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HEADLINE: Focus-poor '**Protocols**' still sees bigotry clearly

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BODY:

Filmmaker Marc **Levin** takes a look at post-Sept. 11 **anti-Semitism** in **Protocols** of Zion, a first-person journey through a major helping of ignorance and hate.

Levin, who appears in the movie to argue with his antagonists and register disbelief, based his far-reaching documentary on **Protocols** of the Elders of Zion, a preposterous and totally discredited 19th-century book about a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world. The book still resonates with neo-Nazis and those looking to vilify world Jewry.

You can't make a movie such as this without turning up some alarming material. At one point, **Levin** interviews the head of the Nation Alliance, a white-supremacist organization. The leader shows **Levin** paraphernalia the organization sells and tells him that one of his heroes, Adolf Hitler, couldn't possibly have had suicidal tendencies. He doesn't quite know how to respond when **Levin** gives him the shocking news: Hitler committed suicide.

Then there's the man in the street, a New Yorker who seems to be entirely serious when he tells **Levin** that Jews run New York City. After all, Mayor Michael Bloomberg is Jewish. "What about Giuliani?" **Levin** asks. Same story. Look at the name. "Jew-liani."

Clearly, **Protocols** of Zion is a running chronicle of ignorance, and it introduces us to people who won't allow their hatred for Jews to be lessened by factual material. If Jews control the media, Australian media magnate Rupert Murdoch must be Jewish. And the movie finds people who repeat the assertion that 4,000 Jewish people employed at

the World Trade Center stayed home Sept. 11. The rationale: The Israelis, the real culprits of Sept. 11, warned off Jews who'd toiled in the Twin Towers.

It hardly comes as a surprise that **Levin** finds people in the Arab world who are ready to malign Jews, deny the Holocaust and otherwise whip themselves into a frenzy. He also interviews Frank Weltner, who runs a Web site called Jew Watch. And, yes, it's all sickening.

But **Levin** allows the movie to wander. Like so many recent documentaries, **Protocols** loses focus; it diffuses its power by including a section in which **Levin** tries to persuade some Hollywood Jews (Larry David and Rob Reiner) to comment on The Passion of the Christ. Moreover, U.S. white supremacists and Arab extremists may have widely divergent motivations.

Levin's movie also could have benefited from a bit of journalistic rigor. He seldom bothers to tell us how widespread this anti-Semitism might be. As it stands, he's made a movie that's more anecdotal than analytical. Still, it's probably useful for the world to know the extreme lengths to which bigotry is willing to travel; **Protocols** may not be the best-made documentary, but it definitely fills in those blanks.

INFOBOX

Protocols of Zion

A look at the new wave of anti-Semitism

* Grade: B-

* Unrated

* Running time: 90 minutes

NOTES: SEE END OF TEXT FOR INFOBOX

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