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HEADLINE: CONFRONTING THE HATERS

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BODY:

"THE MOST dangerous thing for a nation or an individual is to plead guilty to imaginary sins." A century ago the **Jewish** thinker Ahad Ha'am penned these words. Today they seem just as compelling with the release of Marc **Levin's** unnerving new film, "**Protocols** of Zion," which documents a furious resurgence in their global popularity.

The **Protocols** are a hatred-riddled forgery that finds every malady, misfortune, and calamity winding back to a sinister plot of **Jewish** Elders in pursuit of world domination. For a century the **Protocols** have incited and virtually required violence against Jews. Because the Jews are purported to be engaged in a satanic mission, murdering them necessitates neither explanation nor guilt. This worldwide best-seller is the catalytic converter for justifying brutality under the delusional trance of victimhood.

Levin's documentary is very much a personal awakening. From the streets of North Jersey to the jail-cells of Trenton, he encounters the ridiculous claim that no Jews died in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. What follows is an exposition of the latest chapter of history's oldest, most reliable hatred anti-Semitism.

Often documentaries favor the predigested insights of scholars, world leaders, and ivory towers. This film more credibly appraises post-9/11 urban anti-Semitism by presenting one Jew's unfiltered confrontation with haters. Yet as his own personal journey, **Levin's** street tilts slightly right with an anticorporate and ideological extremist bent leaving virtually untouched a dramatic reemergence of left leaning European anti-Semitism and anti-Israel bias in academia. Admittedly,

21st century anti-Semitism has become too large a subject, varying from one continent to the next, to be captured in a single sitting.

An incredulous **Levin** wonders why the Jews are blamed so often for so much by so many. He scratches the surface of deeply seeded cultures of blame and contempt. An indoctrinated world-view rejects any assertion that a Jewish prominence in the media, policymaking, and finance is coincidental. The claim of the **Protocols** is validated by Jewish proximity to power and influence.

Yet simply asking "who benefits most" from a turn of events implies flawless implementation and design by the beneficiary. Outcomes based reasoning is murky science. But any excuse will serve the hater. Jews have been hated for being capitalists and communists, separatists and assimilationists, homeless and nationalist, weak and strong.

Levin's film localizes Jew hatred to the street and the extreme. Yet a blood-soaked history has taught that anti-Semitism is a disease for which education, talent, even genius provides no effective vaccination.

One generation rarely follows precisely a prior generation's blueprint. Inquisitions differed from expulsions, massacres differed from pogroms, and the Holocaust stands alone. Suicide killings represent hatred's latest packaging as a twisted expression of sacred violence. Zealots seek to preserve hostile designs in the garb of religious conviction. Yet this is often little more than another form of identity theft, a "religious opportunism" that is dishonest to motivation and dishonorable to communities of faith.

Certainly hatred for Jews is hardly the world's only hatred. There is an egalitarian distribution today of crimes against humanity. What haters share is a reflexive tendency to externalize responsibility for their condition and their plight. They also share a venomous small-soulness that diminishes their humanity, perverting the purpose and promise of life itself. The world's great religious traditions won't continue to abide such no-fault hostility.

Contemporary culture's emphasis on rights more than responsibilities is rooted in virtues like compassion, the promotion of justice, and the urge to help. But taken to an extreme, they turn people into objects. People become done-to, not doers. By locating the cause for their circumstance outside of themselves, they become totally dependent on others so often locating something or someone else to blame.

In a world of finger-pointing and scapegoating, can one ever accept too much responsibility? Why is it so dangerous to plead guilty to imaginary sins? Perhaps responsibility has an equilibrium. Assuming too much of it breeds neuroses. Too little entitles one to a litany of blame, resentment, and contempt for the other.

May we not prove too neurotic to concede guilt for the contemptuous imaginings of haters. And may the haters, before they further downgrade their own humanity to their ruin, accept responsibility to build a better tomorrow for themselves without tearing down the tomorrow of others.

NOTES: William G. Hamilton is rabbi of Congregation Kehillath Israel in Brookline.

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