

Letter to the Editor

The Protocols of the Elders of Dermatology

Dear *Cutis*[®]:

In 1905, Russia's secret police, referred to as the Okhrana, made the book *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* available to the public. Over the next century, the text was translated into virtually every language, and despite being repeatedly proven a forgery, it was used with great success by such anti-Semites as Adolf Hitler and Henry Ford to foment feelings of hatred toward the Jewish people. Today this "work" still enjoys popularity, mostly in the Arab world where Syrian and Egyptian television stations, sponsored by their respective governments, recently aired a large miniseries based on the *Protocols*. The strange thing is that few people actually *read* the protocols themselves; most just hear excerpts from sources of propaganda. Those who do read them (myself included) usually find them to be extremely tedious and so far removed from reality that one wonders how they can be accepted as fact. This brings me to the question you must be asking: "What does this have to do with dermatology in 2004?"

Several years ago, a Web-based message board was created by a prospective dermatology resident with the intention of sharing information about various programs and helping residency applicants succeed in a very competitive process. I recently revisited the message board,¹ and what I found was simply shocking. The first posting that caught my attention described dermatology as a field "wholly dominated by Jews of Eastern European origin." What followed was a "discussion" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where the recently politically correct anti-Zionism could not restrain the fervent underlying anti-Semitism. I encountered the following: Israelis were described as "vicious animals unleashed against a civilian population"; ridiculous lies, such as "A Jew can today walk into a Palestinian town or house and take it over," were stated as fact; fantasy was presented as reality, for example "Jews can live peacefully almost anywhere in the world at this moment in time. Even in Arab countries there are many Jews who live freely"; those brave enough to defend Israel were called "Jew lovers"; and it

went on and on. A visitor to the site posting comments under the user name *Cosmoderm* offered the following "enlightening" piece of trivia: "Do you know what happens to those foreskins? They're turned into fillers for soft tissue augmentation. The Jews are sure innovative. Cut up their boys then turn around and make money off their own flesh! I guess that's one way of 'spreading' their religion. Just think—millions of Jewish penises are now touching the lips of women across America. . . ." Tried and true blood libels were of course not forgotten. Under the thread *Jews Are Not Chosen People*, several quotes from the New Testament were followed by this editorial comment: "Christ say(sic) the Jews are not of God and that the Jews are the children of the devil and living, walking lies." The Holocaust was mentioned of course, as in ". . . Jews should stop pulling the Holocaust card and just get over it."¹

The statements on the message board read like a 21st century version of the *Protocols*. We are presented with a new Jewish conspiracy (ie, dermatology), a desire to dominate other people (ie, Israel), and preposterous religious tales (ie, foreskins). Mixed with the medieval blood libels, accusations of deicide, and stereotypic images (eg, "Why are Jewish men so short? To make it easier to find pennies on the ground"), we have a classic portrait of bigotry and anti-Semitism. Another message, posted by a user calling himself Bobby Fischer, summed up the discussion in the following way: "Jews control the banks, our legal system, medicine (including dermatology), and Hollywood. Now they control the White House." While the Jews take the brunt of the abuse, other groups are not spared. African Americans "fail to use proper grammar. Yo, down with that, homey." (I think the statement was intended to be humorous, yet it is undeniably offensive.) One posting inquires where to go "if we don't want gay colleagues," while another tells a user not to "act like a freakin' flamer." Personal insults are too numerous to mention, and terms like *Jewish pig*, *camel jockey*, and

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sand niggers abound. The image of dermatology is assessed by the user *Guest* as the following: "I always thought that dermatologists are just a bunch of lazy, money-hungry zit poppers. I've been proven wrong—you guys are a bunch of lazy, money-hungry zit poppers who are also bigots." Based on these postings, I would have to partially agree.

I realize (or hope) that the above statements are made by a very small number of people who are hardly representative of or unique to our specialty. I also realize that the price for freedom of expression is occasionally hearing things that one finds distasteful or simply untrue. I certainly don't consider any topic off-limits for discussion or any political system to be beyond criticism. However, when people justify and even condone the murder of civilians (eg, "Good thing they made you short with ugly pig noses . . . it makes it easier for suicide bombers to identify their target"), I draw the line. As an American citizen, a physician, a student of history, and a human being, I believe it is my duty (as it should be for all of us) to fight bigotry wherever it is found. The first step in doing that is to bring the problem to light and not pretend that it does not exist. My friends ask me why I read this stuff and get myself aggravated, to which I answer in the words attributed to Reverend Martin Niemöller from Germany who wrote in 1945, "They came for the communists, and I didn't object for I wasn't a communist; They came for the socialists, and I didn't object for I wasn't a socialist; They came for the labor leaders, and I didn't object for I wasn't a labor leader; They came for the Jews, and I didn't object for I wasn't a Jew; Then they came for me, and there was no one left to object." Living in the wake of September 11th, the Beslan massacre, train and bus bombings, and the beheading of civilian hostages, the least I can do is object.

Sincerely,
Felix Urman, MD
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REFERENCE

1. Dermatology Message Board. Available at: <http://pub50.ezboard.com/bdermatology>. Accessed September 13, 2004.