

In the late fall of 1991 a student at Pleasantville Community College browses shelves of the college library in search of sources for his history paper on the historical roots of the Arab- Israeli conflict. His eyes fall upon a volume entitled The Protocols of the Elders of Zion· which he looks over and decides to check out. The next day at school he tells other students about the contents of "this blockbuster book I checked out of the library." A Jewish student overhears the description of the Protocols and tells the President of the College's Jewish students' organization about it.

Deeply disturbed, the Jewish students' organization contacts the S'nai 8'rith Anti Defamation League (ADL). After verifying that the Pleasantville Community College in fact has a shelf copy of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the ADL lodges a furiously angry protest with the college administration.

What is the appropriate ethical response of the college administration in this situation?

ANSWER: The principal responsibility of the college administration is to maintain the integrity of the community college as an institution devoted to educational activities at the college level. For this reason, the key issue is not whether members of the community, in this case the ADL, object to having a book in the library, but whether having the book fits with the educational mission of the college. In this situation, despite the spuriousness of the publication, it has played a role in history that would justify having it in the library.

*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion is a notorious tract of anti Semitic propaganda. Purporting to be the manifesto of a tightly knit Jewish conspiracy bent on dominating the world, The Protocols is a forgery, in all likelihood, the work of French anti Semites during the Dreyfus affair in the late nineteenth century. Throughout much of the twentieth century The Protocols has figured in stirring up anti Semitic passions in Europe. Agents of the Czar, for example, used it to instigate bloody pogroms against Russian Jews in the years immediately before World War I.

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