

The Richard Cotten show on WBBM, originally in this unedited form in Chapter 6:

The topic for November 1, 1965 was a throwback, really. Joe McCarthy was dead. The Birchers were marginalized. Goldwater and his crowd had been humiliated in the last election. But Jerry had been intrigued by one of the most unreconstructed right-wingers out there, Richard Cotten of the Committee of Christian Laymen, and he invited him to come on. Cotten was also editor of *The Conservative Viewpoint* and the host of his own radio show. He promised to be just as incendiary as Madalyn Murray or Gus Hall had been, but for very different reasons.

Jerry also invited some people Chicagoans would know, John McDermott of the liberal Catholic Interracial Council and Meyer Levin, a Chicago author with a strong connection to Israel.

After the introductions, it wasn't long before the sparks were struck. Cotten didn't cavil. He assailed the pernicious forces at work in America, including the "Zionist Lobby controlling virtually every facet of our lives," the Negro agitators like Martin Luther King, and the Marxist plan for world domination destroying our country from within. White America needed a defender, he said. The black man has the NAACP. The Jew has the Anti-Defamation League. Why shouldn't the white man have some representation, too? He quoted chapter and verse from magazines, books, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. He was thoroughly prepared, a very cool customer.

Jerry started pushing back right away. He'd dealt with anti-Semites and racists on the phone for years. He'd been the target of anti-Semitism himself, in person. He had a standard approach: back the bigot into a verbal corner where the absurdity of his views would be obvious. He tried to provoke Cotten with barbed questions and subtle insults, but the fish wouldn't take the bait. He kept on, evenly, calmly.

Jerry's other guests went at him from different tacks. McDermott was outraged in a gentlemanly way; he couldn't help calling Cotten's views racist. Levin was probably a bit angry with himself for not being more prepared to refute the library of data that Cotten seemed to have at his fingertips, but what did it matter, really? All of these quotations were nothing more than a smokescreen. Levin knew a Nazi when he heard one, and he said so.

Then Cotten played an unexpected ace.

"Tell me, what's **your** background, Mr. Williams?"

Jerry, nonplussed: "Why does **that** matter?"

"Well, what was your **father's** name, if I may ask?"

That did it. Jerry lost his cool, and the show became a three-on-one tag team match until 11 PM. After an hour or so, Levin shouted, "I can't take any more of this Hitlerite," and stormed out of the studio in a fury, only to come back a while later and continue the fracas.

And of course, the phones went nuts. Nearly everyone was shocked by what Cotten had said and wanted to get their licks in. One woman was particularly incensed, calling him an idiot over and over again. After three hours, Cotten retired from the field, encouraging people to write Jerry with their reactions.

Thousands of cards and letters came in to WBBM, and Jerry kept the pot simmering by reading some of the riper ones on the air. Jerry had seen stuff like this in Boston, but never so much of it: "There were no Jews, Catholics, trouble makers in the

Pilgrims and no Negroes.” “The honorable Germans have finished paying their reparations but not so with Israel, because as the saying goes, ‘There is no honor among thieves.’” “You really fell flat on your hooked nose.” “Perhaps you now have a bit of feeling that we in the South have when your northern press, television, etc. crucify the white man here.” “It was a fair sample of how the Jews try to gang up on anyone who has the brains and the courage to show them up for what they are.” “Generally, your kind of Hebrew are overaggressive . . . violent in your emotions, hate and are hostile, greed for money, money, money consumes you, everything must be ostentaciously, vulgarly showy to draw attention to yourselves. . . . Hate and inner conflict are your master and greatest enemy. Until you conquer yourselves, your own turbulent inner sickness, you will never be like other human beings.” “It doesn’t matter what the Pope of Rome says about absolving the Jews in the death of Jesus Christ. They were the Ones that Crucified him. . . . The Jews are just as Anti-Christ today as they were then.” “God help America if it ever falls into the hands of people such as you seem to prefer.”

The stuff came in from Rome, Georgia. Madison, Wisconsin. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Forest, Louisiana. Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Columbia, Missouri. Gardendale, Alabama. Duluth, Minnesota. Corpus Christi, Texas. Nashville, Tennessee. Springdale, Arkansas. Man, he thought, that signal really travels.

And they’re **out there** tonight.

We assembled this story from a newspaper report (Frances Coughlin, “Anti-Semitic Tirade on Air Causes Furor,” Chicago Tribune, 11/9/65, p. B8) and many letters among the Williams papers, including an unsigned postcard from Harvey, IL postmarked 11/3/65; a postcard from S. Witkowski, Chicago, dated 11/1/65; a letter from R. A. DeYoung, dated 11/1/65; a letter from Alexander Moseley of Nashville, TN, dated 11/3/65 (documenting the mention of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion); a letter from Mrs. L. Q. Suter, dated 11/5/65 (documenting the mention of Jerry’s use of “a Gentile name”)