

History Catches Up to Hoffa-Kennedy

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LOS ANGELES, June 10 — Last February, a manuscript was delivered to Ballantine Books linking James R. Hoffa, former president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and two organized-crime figures, Carlos Marcello and Santos Trafficante, to the assassination of President Kennedy.

Greatly interested in the book but fearful of lawsuits, Ballantine persuaded the authors to use fictional names in place of Mr. Marcello and Mr. Trafficante. The "documentary novel" that resulted was published 10 days ago as "Blood Feud," just days before the leak of the House Assassinations Committee's final report.

The report says that President Kennedy's death was probably the result of a conspiracy, alludes to the possible involvement of Mr. Hoffa in the conspiracy but draws no conclusions about it, and identifies Mr. Marcello and Mr. Trafficante as organized-crime figures most likely to have taken part in such a conspiracy. The caution that Ballantine had taken in eliminat-

ing their names from "Blood Feud" was, it now seemed, unnecessary.

And Robert Boris, "Blood Feud's" co-author, says wryly, "I spent a year and a library card finding out what it took the committee two and a half years and \$5 million to discover."

Television Version

Ballantine is now considering using the real names of Mr. Marcello, Mr. Trafficante and José Aleman, a purported Central Intelligence Agency double agent who testified before the committee, in future editions of the book. It naturally hopes that the first edition of 20,000 copies will sell out. The book's co-author, Edward Hannibal, has delivered the applicable original manuscript pages to be replated.

Just a week before the book's publication, NBC-TV, which had been involved with a television version of "Blood Feud" for two years, decided to go ahead with another effort at getting a suitable script, aimed at making the book into a four-hour miniseries.

"Blood Feud" began as a six-page television idea. Called "The Kennedy-Hoffa War," the idea was submitted by Joel Glickman of Selznick/Glickman

Productions to NBC in 1977; it simply dealt with the 12-year battle between Robert Kennedy and Mr. Hoffa. J.P. Miller, author of "The Days of Wine and Roses," was assigned to write a two-hour television movie. The script was "disappointing," according to William Storko, vice president of special programs at NBC.

"But there was \$12,000 left of the money NBC had allocated," says Daniel Selznick. "The network said if I could find a writer to work for that fee, we could do another script." Mr. Selznick chose the little-known Mr. Boris, who had written the screenplay of "Electra Glide in Blue."

'I Became Obsessed'

"I became obsessed with the material as I did research," says Mr. Boris. "The Kennedy Administration waged an extraordinary war on organized crime. In 1959, before Bobby Kennedy became Attorney General, 74 organized-crime figures were targeted for prosecution; 35 went to trial, and eight were convicted. In 1960, 700 were targeted, 300 went to trial, and there were 160 convictions. Bobby Kennedy was the biggest threat to their empire.

Book

"I didn't have any theories about the assassination of President Kennedy when I started. I wasn't writing about the assassination. But about six months into the research the connections became too disturbing to dismiss. It was an incestuous bed. The same names kept popping up all over. For example, Jack Ruby was a Teamster official in 1942 and involved in a Teamster murder."

Mr. Boris wrote a 489-page television script, using real names, in which he made connections among Mr. Trafficante, Mr. Marcello, Mr. Ruby and Lee Harvey Oswald. It was delivered to the network in May 1978, and "NBC sat on it because Fred Silverman had just become president and everything was frozen," says Mr. Selznick. So Mr. Boris decided to turn his eight-hour script into a book. It was sold to Ballantine, which put Edward Hannibal on to the project with him. According to Mr. Boris, the book is essentially factual; however, dialogue has been invented based on conversations that are known to have taken place. Hence its placement in that still rather new and still uneasy category "documentary novel."