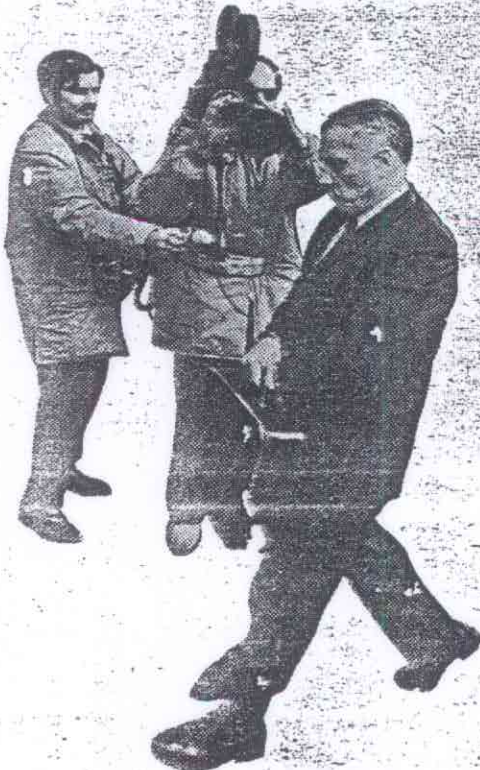


Book Review



E. M. Forster.



James R. Hoffa.

Born In Violence

THE TEAMSTERS

By Steven Brill.
399 pp. New York:
Simon and Schuster. \$11.95.

THE HOFFA WARS

By Dan E. Moldea.
421 pp. New York:
Paddington Press. \$10.95.

By FRED J. COOK

THE only time I met Jimmy Hoffa was in the hallway of the palatial Teamsters headquarters in Washington. It was in the spring of 1964, and he was about to get into an elevator. As we shook hands, he said: "I've got to catch a plane to appear before that pissy-ant judge in Tennessee and let him chew me up in little bitty pieces and get my fanny kicked." That was Mr. Hoffa, burly, bull-strong, earthy, contemptuous of authority — and certainly one of the most powerful labor leaders in America at the time.

Mr. Hoffa departed for Chattanooga, where Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy's special "get-Hoffa" squad had pinned him with a jury-tampering conviction, the first guilty verdict in his turbulent career. And he got his "fanny kicked" with an eight-year prison sentence.

It was a sentence that spelled the downfall of the dictatorial president of the Brotherhood of Teamsters, and it paved the way for the ultimate mystery — the still-unresolved manner in which James R. Hoffa, once free and striving to recapture his lost power, simply vanished from the face of the earth on July 30, 1975.

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Fred J. Cook is a journalist who has written extensively about the problems of crime and the underworld.

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Steven Brill, in "The Teamsters" has written a book broad in scope and sound in research. It captures both the essence of Mr. Hoffa and the essence of the Teamsters; it contrasts brilliantly what was with what might have been — and with what, given the brutal, brawling nature of the Teamsters, may never be.

When Mr. Hoffa went to prison, he expected to run the shop through a hand-picked stooge. The man he chose for this role was Frank Fitzsimmons, whom Mr. Brill pictures (accurately, I think, from the attitude around Teamster headquarters at the time) as having been little more than Mr. Hoffa's errand-boy and coffee-getter. Mr. Fitzsimmons had been known as Mr. Hoffa's "gofer," but once installed in Mr. Hoffa's chair, the "gofer" found he liked being boss. So the basis was laid for a classic power struggle when Mr. Hoffa, released from prison by Presidential clemency after Teamster contributions of a reported \$1 million to the Nixon slush fund, decided to challenge the leadership of his one-time "gofer."

As Mr. Brill makes clear, the Teamsters is a union born in violence and wedded to violence in an unholy alliance that may never be severed. When Mr. Hoffa was climbing to power in the Depression-ridden 1930's, employer goon squads were attempting to crush the union. Muscle had to be met with muscle; and Mr. Hoffa, not having enough muscle in his own infant union, forged his alliance with leaders of the Mafia. It was a marriage of necessity — but one, once consummated, that could never be severed by annulment.

It is an alliance that continues today. Mr. Brill's account gives the story an ironic twist. The bosses of the underworld, who had dealt with Mr. Hoffa for decades, found Mr. Fitzsimmons much more malleable. Were Mr. Hoffa to return to power, they might still be able to deal with him, but he would be tough and would want a much bigger cut of the action. Cruising along with Mr. Fitzsimmons, as they had discovered, represented much more pleasant sailing.

The result: Old allies became deadly enemies. Mr. Brill cites a 50-page F.B.I. memo code-

named Hoffex, that focuses strong suspicion on the role played by Anthony (Tony Pro) Provenzano, the powerful North Jersey teamster boss with whom Mr. Hoffa had quarreled in prison.

Versions of the nature of their quarrel differ, but all agree that it was vicious. When Mr. Hoffa decided to challenge the provisions of his prison release barring him from union activity — a preliminary to his projected contest with Mr. Fitzsimmons for the presidency — he was urged to patch up his feud with Tony Pro. At first, Mr. Hoffa refused, but finally he was lured to a meeting at the Machus Red Fox Restaurant in a Detroit suburb.

Mr. Brill, quoting the Hoffex memo, establishes this sequence: The supposed "meet" with Mr. Provenzano was arranged by Anthony (Tony Jack) Giacalone, a Detroit mob lieutenant close to Mr. Hoffa; the car in which Mr. Hoffa was picked up belonged to Mr. Giacalone's son and was driven by Charles (Chückie) O'Brien, Mr. Hoffa's foster-son; in it were three of Tony Pro's toughs, Thomas Andretta and the brothers Gabriel and Salvatore (Sally Bugs) Briguglio.

Once lured into the back seat of the car, Mr. Hoffa was knocked unconscious. The Hoffex memo and other F.B.I. documents report the finding of a blood-stained strand of Mr. Hoffa's hair and "definite signs of Hoffa's blood, hair and skin in that car." Citing F.B.I. informants whose word has been good in the past, Mr. Brill concludes that Mr. Hoffa was taken to a nearby garbage-shredding and incinerating plant, where his body was cremated.

This part of Mr. Brill's account has been disputed by the F.B.I. The bureau, according to a spokesman, investigated but discounted the incineration theory. However, Mr. Brill quotes an F.B.I. memo as indicating that the shredder-incinerator had been used to dispose of the bodies of at least 10 gangland victims. He also notes that this version of Mr. Hoffa's demise had been given to the F.B.I. by two informants independently.

Mr. Brill's meticulous research contrasts sharply with the insubstantial theorizing in-

Dan E. Moldea's "The Hoffa Wars." The flaw appears in Mr. Moldea's first chapter, in which he attempts to tie Mr. Hoffa into the C.I.A.'s plots to assassinate

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Fidel Castro. He writes: "Strong evidence points to the fact that the original middleman between the C.I.A. and the American underworld was Jimmy Hoffa. . . ." What strong evidence? We are not told. For this and other theorizing that Mr. Hoffa was plotting with mob leaders to assassinate President Kennedy, we have to rely on Mr. Moldea's word that "investigators say" so.

The hard evidence unearthed during Senator Frank Church's investigation of our intelligence agencies shows nothing of the kind. Mr. Church established that the C.I.A. approach to the underworld was made through Robert Maheu, a former F.B.I. agent and one-time director of Howard Hughes's gambling empire in Las Vegas. Mr. Maheu had been accepting assignments from the C.I.A. ever since 1954. It strains logic to suggest that the C.I.A. would have had to deal with Mr. Hoffa when it had Mr. Maheu on a \$500-a-month retainer.

Much of Mr. Moldea's book is marred by the same kind of theorizing. We are led through accounts of underworld ties so intricate that there are chapters in which Mr. Hoffa's name hardly appears except to suggest he was linked to all of them.

Mr. Brill, on the other hand, hews closely to the themes that really matter. He spells out the Central Pension Fund's shabby, multimillion dollar loans to Mr. Hoffa's mobster pals; he describes the "sweetheart contracts" by which Mr. Hoffa, Mr. Provenzano and others permitted favored truckers to pay their drivers less than scale, thus cheating their own members for their own personal profit. Yet he shows (again, I think, quite accurately) the regard in which most rank-and-file Teamsters continued to hold Mr. Hoffa, despite his sins. He had the toughness they admired, and they remembered him as the hard-nosed bargainer who had lifted them out of penury and brought them contracts that enabled many to earn \$500 a week or more.

In two colorful profiles, Mr. Brill also shows that there are honest and capable men among the Teamster leaders. He focuses on Ron Carey, president of New York Local 804, as an honest, hard-working and modestly paid leader who has refused crooked deals, defied pressure from national headquarters and finally is surviving in a state of uneasy détente with the top leadership. Mr. Brill's second favorite is Harold Gibbons, the St. Louis Teamster boss, a Socialist who in the 1950's had pioneered such things as free health care, a food co-op to cut members' bills, indoor and outdoor recreation centers, and rent-subsidized housing for retirees.

Mr. Gibbons had been Mr. Hoffa's right-hand man, a power in the union, the logical choice to succeed Mr. Hoffa when the boss went to prison. But Mr. Gibbons offended Mr. Hoffa by lowering the flag on Teamster headquarters to half-mast the day President Kennedy was killed and ordering appropriate mourning by the staff. When he heard of it, Mr. Hoffa blew every gasket, and Mr. Gibbons told him to get himself a new errand boy.

The final tragedy of the Teamsters, then, is that capable leaders like Ron Carey and Harold Gibbons dare venture just so far — and no farther. Mr. Gibbons would have liked to challenge Mr. Fitzsimmons for the leadership, but he told a friend he was afraid that he might exit from the Teamsters' world "horizontally" if he did.

Mr. Hoffa's exit in just that manner seems to have vindicated that judgment. Other more recent events have also demonstrated that the shadow of murder still hovers over the Teamsters. "Sally Bugs" Briguglio, the Provenzano hit man who knew perhaps too much for his own good about Mr. Hoffa's disappearance and the 1961 murder of a Tony Pro rival, Anthony (Three Fingers) Costellito, was silenced in the final way the mob has of silencing people. And Tony Pro himself, finally brought to trial for that old 1961 murder, was convicted this June in Kingston, N.Y., and sentenced to life in prison.

Given such events, one concludes Mr. Brill's excellent account of Mr. Hoffa and the Teamsters with the feeling that little is likely to change in the future. The Ron Careys and the Harold Gibbonses, by their example, illustrate the kind of union the Teamsters might become. But even they are deterred by the thought: "If even Jimmy Hoffa...." They dare think no further. ■