

Title: "I Heard You Paint Houses"
Author: Charles Brandt
Publisher: Steerforth Press
Copyright date: 2004
Length: 293 pages
Reading time: 8-10 hours
Reading difficulty: 8 (1= very difficult; 10 = very easy)
Price: \$25
Overall rating: 4 (1 = average; 4 = excellent)

The Teamsters union has been in the news recently because of its decision to withdraw from the AFL-CIO. This decision was spearheaded by current Teamster president, James P. Hoffa, son of the legendary Teamster president, James R. "Jimmy" Hoffa, who mysteriously disappeared three decades ago.

For thirty years, America has reflected on the disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa, whose car was found in the parking lot of a restaurant outside of Detroit, Michigan, on July 30, 1975. Immediately following Hoffa's disappearance, rumors began circulating. Some speculated that he was killed and buried beneath the turf of a football stadium; others contended that he was kidnapped, killed, encased in cement and dumped at sea. But until now, only those people directly involved in Hoffa's disappearance knew the truth.

"I Heard You Paint House" is the remarkable story of Jimmy Hoffa's rise to power, the internal politics of the most powerful labor union in the country, the relationship of key Teamster leaders with the mob, and Hoffa's last ride.

This book is a "whodunit" based on personal interviews that the author, Charles Brandt, conducted with Frank Sheehan, a personal friend of Jimmy Hoffa and a reputed member of the La Cosa Nostra. The first recorded interview was conducted in 1991; the last conversation was videotaped shortly before Sheehan's death in 2003. These recordings, and this book which is based on those conversations, constitute the final chapter of the Hoffa tragedy.

This book recounts Hoffa's rise to power in the Teamsters union and describes the involvement of reputed mob bosses in Teamster operations. Moreover, it paints a vivid portrait of Frank Sheehan, a made member of the mob who was considered a suspect by the FBI. Readers interested in the organizing tactics of a large, powerful labor union will find this book quite revealing. Those interested in the connection between organized labor and organized crime will glean new insights into these relationships. Most readers, however, will be drawn to this book because it answers three important questions: Who killed Jimmy Hoffa? Why was he killed? and What happened to the body?

"I Heard You Paint Houses," a mafia expression that means, "I understand you kill people," is a chilling, documented account of America's most flamboyant labor leader whose refusal to separate himself from the Teamsters union led to his death. It is a well-written, totally absorbing story.

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