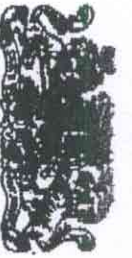


# OBSERVER



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## Memphis businessman admits to hiring

### Exclusive

Andrew Biles

A RETIRED American businessman has confessed to hiring the assassin of civil rights leader Martin Luther King. The businessman, from Memphis, Tennessee, has applied for immunity from prosecution in return for naming the gunman and others behind the killing, 25 years ago.

His testimony and that of four other witnesses also seeking im-

munity, apparently exonerates James Earl Ray, who is serving a 99-year sentence for the crime. Ray has long fought to prove his innocence. Although there has been much circumstantial evidence pointing to a conspiracy, this is the first time a principal participant has confessed.

King was killed on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis on 4 April 1968. Ray, who was on the run from jail and had rented a room in a boarding house opposite the motel, was jailed after a two-and-a-half hour

hearing in 1969. The prosecution claimed he acted alone — the 'one-witness' explanation.

The evidence of the five 'conspirators' — two men and three women — is as follows:

- The killer was not Ray.
- The shot that killed King came from the shrub area facing the Lorraine, not from Ray's rooming house, as alleged by the prosecution in 1969.

- The man who hired the killer was paid in volumes of large bills and retrieved the murder weapon after the shooting.

- The hiree was assured that a 'decoy' (presumably Ray) had been arranged who would take the blame for the killing.

According to the businessman, whose name, the gunman was a local man with a reputation as a shot. He received \$10,000. It is not known if he is still alive.

## Martin Luther King's assassin

The conspirator owned a business near the Lorraine. He went on to become a multi-millionaire, building his empire on the \$100,000 reward for organizing King's assassination. He claims he was contacted by two men, one, now dead, a prominent local entrepreneur associated with New Orleans, and another still living in Tennessee. 'New Orleans' can be read as a synonym for the Mafia.

Two of the other four now seeking immunity were black

woman who worked for the boss-  
neman. A fourth witness, also a  
black woman, was hit lower. She  
says she saw him breathlessly  
cover his premises holding the  
rifle after the shooting. The fifth  
witness, a black male, says he was  
approached later by the business-  
man to 'take care' of people 'who  
knew too much.'

The fire came forward only  
reluctantly. It seems they became  
convinced that a 16-year invest-  
igation by Dr. Bill Peppes, Ray's  
lawyer, would sooner or later lead  
to their prosecution. They prefer  
to volunteer the truth in return  
for immunity.

The fact of their application  
has been confirmed by their law-  
yers, Lewis Garrison, who has wit-  
nesses their statements. The  
five have also been interviewed by  
a private detective who has

spoken at length to *The Observer*

Dr. Peppes, who has repre-  
sented Ray since 1988, believes  
the new evidence will clear his  
client. He has become frustrated,  
however, by the reluctance of  
John Penon, the District Attor-  
ney-General in Memphis, to con-  
sider the immunity requests sub-  
mitted to him in June.

Last Wednesday, Wayne  
Chasam, a local attorney acting  
on Dr. Peppes's instructions, ap-  
peared for a hearing before a Grand  
jury in Tennessee in which he  
will name the five and part on

record their confessions. He is  
asking for the witnesses to be sub-  
poenaed to give evidence in  
return for immunity.

Dr. Peppes said: 'I believe the  
trial ultimately leads back to  
FBI director J. Edgar Hoover,  
and particular associates of his in  
the business and intelligence  
communities. I am convinced

that in the not too distant future  
the world will have a very good  
idea of who was really behind Dr.  
King's assassination. The conspirator  
confessors,  
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# The conspirator confesses

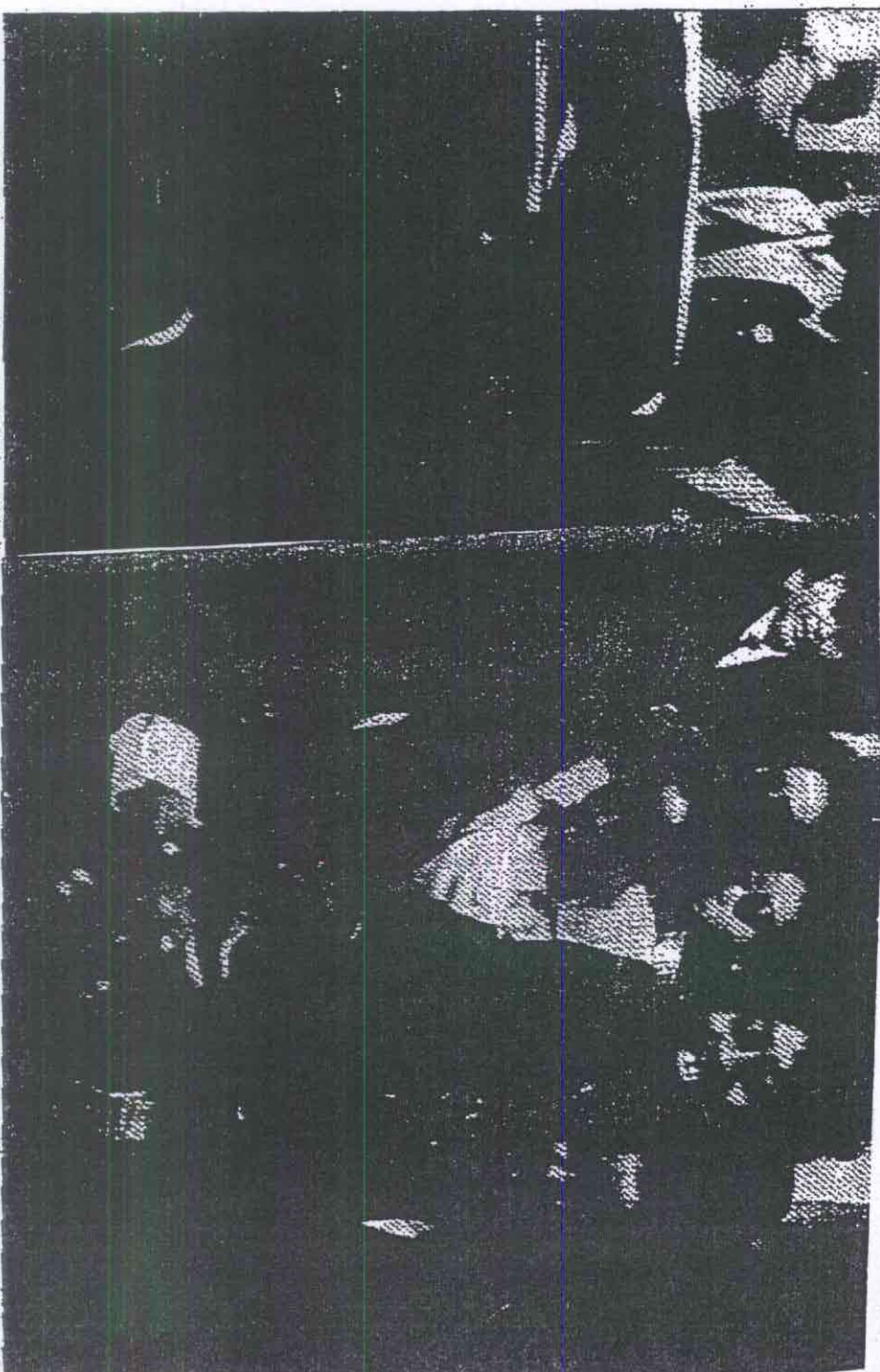
Startlingly evidence has emerged on who really murdered Martin Luther King, writes Andrew Billen.

**A**T one minute past six on 4 April 1968, Dr Martin Luther King walked on to the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, and snelt the evening air for the last time. A second later, a high-velocity bullet struck his jaw, severed his spine and made a hole big enough, said a civil rights colleague, for a fist. He was 39.

It was almost a year before the United States could believe King's killer had been found and jailed. A Memphis court heard the following March that the assassin was a southern lowlife called James Earl Ray, 40, a habitual criminal who had been on the run from jail at the time of the killing.

The motive alleged was simple: Ray was a racist, who was planning to emigrate to racially segregated Rhodesia. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 99 years in jail.

Even in 1969, 88 per cent of Americans were not convinced King was killed by an assassin working alone. Nine years later, the House Select Committee on Assassinations con-



Martin Luther King killed in 1968 by a single high-velocity bullet as he stood on a motel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. Photograph by Leonard Freed.

cluded Ray had been hired by 'competitors unknown'.

Evidence has now come before a Grand Jury in Shelby County, Tennessee, suggesting the committee was both right and wrong: a conspiracy, yes, but one that involved Ray only in the role of patsy.

What distinguishes the new information from the 'evidence' which regularly emerges from America's conspiracy machine is that it contains confessions. No one, after all, has ever admitted arranging the murder of John F. Kennedy. In Memphis, however, a successful businessman has signed an affidavit, vouching in front of his lawyer, in which he admits hiring the gunman, standing near him when he fired and disposing of the gun.

Three other witnesses say they were close by when the shot was fired. A fourth was hired to 'take care' of people who 'knew too much'.

The official version of King's killing has Ray arriving in Memphis the night before the shooting armed with a rifle he had bought in Birmingham, Alabama, on 10 March.

Reading in the local paper that King was staying at the Lorraine, he rented a room in a boarding house opposite the motel on the day of the shooting. He shot King from a bathroom window, fled and, in his panic, dropped his belongings, including the rifle.

The prosecution's only eye-witness was Charles Stephens, the tenant staying next door to Ray, who claimed he heard the shot, and saw Ray turn at the end of the corridor and disappear down the stairs. A taxi driver has since testified that

Stephens was so drunk that afternoon that, when he arrived to pick him up shortly before the shooting, Stephens he was too far gone to get off his bed.

James Earl Ray is now 65 and has spent nearly 25 years in jail. He has long maintained that the only reason he was in Memphis was to buy a large-bore deer-hunting rifle for a man he knew as 'Raoul', who had met in Montreal the previous summer and Ray had accepted money from him in return for smuggling across the U.S.-Canadian border.

By March, says Ray, Raoul was interested in smuggling guns into Mexico. He asked Ray to bring a sample to Memphis, where Raoul was to meet buyers. He handed over the gun on 3 April and they met the next day at Ray's lodgings. Ray left Raoul there at about 5.15pm. When Ray returned shortly afterwards the place was awash with police. He fled.

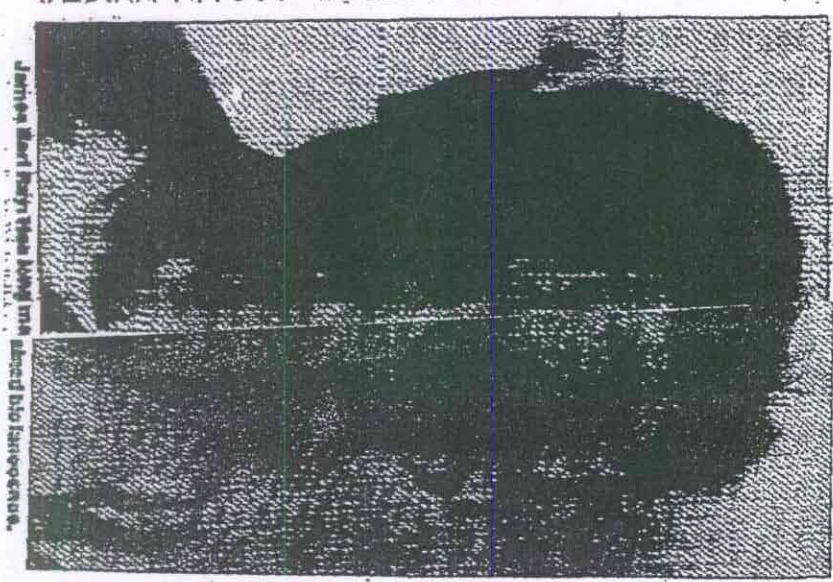
The evidence of the five new witnesses supports Ray's version in the sense that it leaves him out. The only preference is to a decoy to lead the man-hunt in the wrong direction. It also corroborates, for the first time, the existence of Raoul.

The five are seeking immunity from prosecution and cannot be named. But by talking to their lawyers, and the investigator and lawyer working for Dr William Pepper, the London-based barrister and US attorney representing Ray, we have sketched portraits. In the request for immunity now with the District Attorney-General in Memphis, the five are referred to as colours.

The first, Wilma Green, the principal in the story, is white. She is a semi-retired millwright living outside Memphis. In 1968, he was too far gone to get off his bed. James Earl Ray is now 65 and has spent nearly 25 years in jail. He has long maintained that the only reason he was in Memphis was to buy a large-bore deer-hunting rifle for a man he knew as 'Raoul', who had met in Montreal the previous summer and Ray had accepted money from him in return for smuggling across the U.S.-Canadian border.

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James Earl Ray in 1968, as depicted by witnesses.

Shortly before King visited Memphis, two local businessmen approached Green and told him his business was ideally located for an attempt to kill King. He was told that individuals in New Orleans would pay him \$100,000 to arrange the murder. (New Orleans is a virtual synonym for the K.L.F.) A weapon would be provided.

At a later meeting, one of the 'contractors' was joined by a Hispanic-looking man, who assured Green that a decoy would be provided to ensure 'there would be no reason to suspect him or any of the other participants' in the assassination. Green, in a videotaped interview with his lawyer, said he understood this man to be the overseer of the operation. He was called 'Raoul' — or 'Raoul' in his pronunciation.

Green says he found his gunman in a local odd-jobber, a black man, rumoured to be educationally subnormal but who was a crack shot. Green hired him for \$10,000.

On 4 April, Green's gunman hid in tall shrubs facing the Lorraine. Green was nearby. Just after 6pm, Brown, Black and Grey, at work in Green's premises, heard the shot. Soon afterwards, Brown saw Green rush into the building carrying the rifle, which he disassembled and wrapped up.

Later that day he brought to Black that he had 'found' the gun that had killed King, but would hand it to the police.

Soon afterwards, Green became nervous of what he had told his staff and what Brown had seen. He sought out White, who, in his thirties, has been convicted of four killings. In his

affidavit, White says he was 'offered an amount to 'make certain that certain persons were not around to testify'. Nothing, it seems, came of this until 1983, when Green asked White to kill his former lover. Shots were fired but Brown escaped. Later, Brown and White became lovers. The five were advised to apply for immunity by Lewis Garrison, Green's lawyer. Garrison — who is no relation to Jim Garrison, the New Orleans District Attorney, involved in the investigation into the Kennedy assassination — applied for immunity to John Piferotti, the District Attorney-General, in June. A summary of the information the five would give was delivered on 22 June. Piferotti says he will not act until the US government grants immunity.

Pepper, acting independently of Garrison, is now attempting to get the Memphis Grand Jury to subpoena the witnesses. The Grand Jury can also issue immunity.

Last week, Garrison confirmed he would apply for federal immunity for his clients. Without a doubt there has been a major miscarriage of justice. I would love now for the truth to come out but without immunity we may still be a very long way from justice.

Like many Americans, Piferotti believes the trail leads to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and his business and intelligence associates. If he faces Ray, his next, larger task, will be to name those he believes conspired in back rooms, government offices and board-rooms far from Memphis.