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MEMPHIS PROSECUTOR TO HEAR EVIDENCE ON KING

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But District Attorney General John Pierotti, who up to now has called the case "a sham and a fraud," said he will not grant immunity to anyone claiming to have been part of a conspiracy to murder King.

"If someone actually is guilty of capital murder and I give him immunity just to clear the books on this, I ought to be run out of town," the prosecutor said.

Pierotti's remarks came as the ABC-TV prepared to air an interview with Memphis businessman Lloyd Jowers, who claims he played a role in a conspiracy to assassinate King.

ABC said in a statement Jowers, who owned a restaurant located below the boarding house where Ray was staying at the time of the assassination, will tell ABC's Prime Time Live program Thursday evening that he hired someone other than Ray to carry out the killing.

King was killed April 4, 1968, on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis.

Ray, who has long maintained his innocence in the slaying, is serving a 99-year sentence.

On Tuesday, a Shelby County grand jury refused to grant a hearing to a private Memphis attorney who wants to subpoena five witnesses whose testimony he claims would exonerate Ray.

Lawyer Wayne Chastain, acting on the instructions of Ray's attorney, Bill Pepper, applied for a hearing before a grand jury in Tennessee in which he would name a retired U.S. businessman who claims to have hired the man who killed King.

King's family have declined to comment on case. But the Rev Jesse Jackson, who was with King at the time of the shooting, said Sunday he has always suspected a conspiracy.

The latest episode came to light over the weekend, when a London newspaper, The Observer, reported that a Memphis businessman confessed to arranging King's murder in exchange for a \$100,000 payment from two other men, including one with alleged links to the Mafia.

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PROSECUTOR CLOSES DOOR TO PRESS ON KING CLAIMS

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Shelby County Attorney General John Pierotti told reporters his office and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation would investigate reports that a Memphis businessman arranged King's assassination.

The businessman, Lloyd Jowers, interviewed on the ABC-TV programme "Prime Time Live," demanded immunity from prosecution before testifying about his role.

King was killed April 4, 1968, on a Memphis hotel balcony after coming to the city to support strikers.

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King Assassination

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By WOODY BAIRD
Associated Press Writer

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) -- A state prosecutor said he will investigate new claims of a conspiracy in the murder of Martin Luther King Jr., though he does not put much credence in them.

"We can either corroborate what they're saying or we can disprove it, maybe," John Pierotti, the chief state prosecutor, said Friday.

The claims, which have fueled news reports for the past week, were repeated Thursday on ABC News "PrimeTime Live" by Loyd Jowers, 67, a former Memphis businessman who says he hired a killer to murder the civil rights leader.

Jowers, who once owned a restaurant, Jim's Grill, near the murder scene, said the killer was not James Earl Ray, who confessed to shooting King in Memphis in 1968 and is serving a 99-year prison sentence.

Jowers said he was asked by a friend, former Memphis produce dealer Frank Liberto, to find someone to kill King. Liberto is now deceased. His widow has discounted Jowers' story.

Pierotti said his staff and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation will look into Jowers' claims. He said he will not ask the FBI or the Justice Department to get involved.

Pierotti said he had no idea why Jowers, who appeared on the TV show with his Memphis lawyer Lewis Garrison, is coming forward now.

"I don't know what their reason is. I really don't have to know why. I just have to know either it can be substantiated or it cannot be substantiated," he told a news conference.

Garrison said Jowers is willing to talk with authorities, if given immunity from prosecution.

Pierotti said he will not grant immunity to anyone claiming to have taken part in a murder. He said he does not plan to interview Jowers unless his investigation indicates that is warranted.

Ray, a drifter and small-time criminal, was arrested in London two months after the murder and brought to Memphis where he entered the guilty plea in 1969.

He has tried often over the years to take back his guilty plea, contending he was set up by a man he know only as "Raoul."

Authorities say Ray shot King from the window of a rooming house near the Lorraine Motel, where King was staying while he helped

organize a strike by city sanitation workers.

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The businessman, Lloyd Jowers, interviewed on the ABC-TV program "Prime Time Live," demanded immunity from prosecution before testifying about his role.

The Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, president of the civil rights group King lead until his assassination, asked the Justice Department after the broadcast to investigate the assertions that the real killers have never been found, The New York Times said in its Saturday editions.

Lowery, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said there were enough unanswered questions about King's death and enough lingering questions about a conspiracy that the report had to be investigated, the newspaper said.

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