

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT ASSEMBLY

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WITNESSES TO THE WOUND

A Covenant Investigation into the Exploitation of the Zamar Carriers

100 Years of the Music Business on Trial

Report No. 9 of an Ongoing Series

LITTLE RICHARD

1932 – 2020

Richard Wayne Penniman — The Architect of Rock and Roll

Father murdered when Richard was 19 — signed Specialty Records contract as a dishwasher supporting 12 siblings — half a cent per record sold — sold his publishing rights for \$50 — label withheld royalties as leverage to keep him recording — settled 1959 lawsuit for \$11,000 to waive all future royalties — picketed Hollywood Boulevard demanding his own money — died having never been paid what he was owed

NOTE: This report contains primary testimony from Little Richard himself AND from Art Rupe, founder of Specialty Records — the perpetrator confessing on camera

March 2026 · Kepha Arcemont, Elder and Founder

SECTION ONE — THE GIFT: WHO YAHWEH MADE HIM

Biography: Born Screaming, Born for Sound

Richard Wayne Penniman was born December 5, 1932, in Macon, Georgia — the third of twelve children of Charles Penniman, a bricklayer, bootlegger, and lay minister, and Leva Mae Penniman. He was born with one leg shorter than the other, one eye larger than the other, and a head that family members described as misshapen. He was different from the moment he arrived. He was also born with a voice.

The voice was immediately evident. Neighbors complained about it. He was stopped from singing in church for "*screaming and hollering*" too loud. He earned the nickname *War Hawk* for the volume and intensity of his singing. His family formed a gospel group, the Penniman Singers, performing in local churches. He attended Pentecostal churches and was moved by their ecstatic worship. He would later say that people sometimes testified to healing when he ministered to them while singing. **The covenant gift was operating before he ever set foot in a recording studio.**

He left home young, performing in minstrel shows and nightclubs as a teenager. He received an early recording contract with RCA in 1951 that produced nothing commercially significant. Then, in 1952, his father was shot dead outside a bar in Macon. Richard was 19 years old. There were twelve brothers and sisters. He was the eldest boy at home. He took a job washing dishes at a Greyhound bus station. He played shows at hole-in-the-wall clubs across the Southeast for whatever the room would give him. As he later told his biographer: "*You know you're poor when you have to make a fire and you ain't got no wood.*"

In February 1955, on the advice of Lloyd Price, he sent a demo tape to Specialty Records. He called them nearly every week for a year. They finally relented. He was brought to New Orleans for a session with producer Bumps Blackwell. At that session, Little Richard howled ***Tutti Frutti*** into the microphone and changed the world. "*A wop bop a loo bop, a lop bam boom.*" It sold 200,000 copies in the first week and a half. By 1968 it had sold more than 3 million. **Within eighteen months he had released *Tutti Frutti*, *Long Tall Sally*, *Rip It Up*, *Good Golly Miss Molly*, *Lucille*, *Ready Teddy*, and *Jenny Jenny*** — the core catalog of rock and roll's first great voice.

Paul McCartney, who learned his signature falsetto by studying Little Richard's recordings, acknowledged him as the most important influence on the Beatles' vocal approach. Mick Jagger cited him. Jimi Hendrix toured in his band in 1964 before becoming Hendrix. Sam Phillips of Sun Records allegedly said before signing Elvis: "*If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars.*" **He was describing Little Richard, who already existed and was already being paid half a cent per record.**

◆ *I have been a guitarist and vocalist since I was fourteen. I know what it means to carry a sound that is unmistakable, that is yours alone, that cannot be reproduced by anyone else no matter how hard they try. Little Richard had that. The voice. The piano. The performance style. The wild, joyous, terrifying energy of a man who sang gospel like the Holy Spirit was chasing him. That is the zamar in its fullest form — the covenant musician so fully inhabited by*

the gift that the room has no choice but to respond. He was paid half a cent per record. The dishwasher who changed music history. The covenant indictment practically writes itself.

Born	December 5, 1932 — Macon, Georgia. One of twelve children.
Father murdered	1952 — Richard was 19, supporting 12 siblings, washing dishes at Greyhound bus station
Specialty Records	Signed 1955 — after calling them weekly for a year from Macon
Tutti Frutti (1955)	200,000 copies in first 10 days; 3 million+ by 1968; defined rock and roll
Royalty rate	Half a cent per record sold
Publishing sold for	\$50 — he sold his publishing rights to Specialty for fifty dollars
1959 lawsuit	Sued Specialty; settled for \$11,000 to waive ALL future royalties permanently
1984 lawsuit	Filed \$112 million lawsuit against Specialty, ATV Music, Venice Music for unpaid royalties; settled out of court 1986
Label confession	Art Rupe (Specialty founder) on camera: 'We did everything trying to get him to come back, including withholding his royalties'
Final years	Described by son as having 'come to the reality' he would never be paid; died May 9, 2020
Recognition	Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inaugural class 1986. Grammy Lifetime Achievement 1993.

SECTION TWO — THE WOUND: WHAT WAS DONE TO HIM

The Exploitation — Spoken by Both Sides

This report contains the most complete bilateral primary record in the series. Little Richard spoke on camera about what was done to him. Art Rupe, founder of Specialty Records, spoke on camera about what he did. Both testimonies are preserved in the PBS American Masters documentary *Little Richard: King and Queen of Rock 'n' Roll*. The label's founder confesses. The artist testifies. The covenant does not need to interpret the gap. Both voices fill it.

The Artist's Testimony

“If you spoke for your money, you was a troublemaker. But if you just went along with the program, didn’t say nothing, you was a ‘good boy.’ Never a man — a ‘good boy.’ Mind, the record company’s not paying me my royalties. I had to work all the time.” — Little Richard — PBS American Masters documentary

This testimony is the covenant record in one paragraph. The mechanism of the industry's exploitation of Black artists is named by one of its primary victims with surgical precision: **demand your wages and you are a troublemaker; accept the theft quietly and you are a good boy.** The infantilizing language of the system — “good boy” — is itself the covenant charge. A man who creates the foundation of a commercial genre worth hundreds of billions of dollars is addressed as a boy when he asks where his money is. **Never a man.** Those three words carry the full weight of Vayikra 19:13 and Devarim 25:4 simultaneously.

“Whoever heard cutting a penny in half! It didn’t matter how many records you sold if you were Black. The publishing rights were sold to the record label before the record was even released.” — Little Richard — on his contract

Half a cent per record. He wrote these songs. He recorded them. He performed them. The publishing rights — the ongoing commercial property that generates revenue every time a song is performed, covered, licensed, or played — were sold to Specialty Records for **\$50**. Fifty dollars. Before the record was released. Before he knew what those songs would become. Before he had any legal representation or any understanding of what publishing rights meant commercially. **He sold the inheritance of his own gift for fifty dollars.** Not because he was foolish. Because he was a 22-year-old dishwasher in Macon, Georgia, supporting twelve siblings after his father's murder, and the man with the recording studio was the only door that looked open.

The Perpetrator's Testimony

“We did everything trying to get him to come back, including withholding his royalties.” — Art Rupe, Founder of Specialty Records — PBS American Masters documentary

Art Rupe said this on camera. In a documentary. To be broadcast on PBS American Masters. The founder of Specialty Records confirmed, in his own words, that when Little Richard left the label in 1957 to pursue evangelical ministry, the label's response was to **withhold his royalties** as leverage to compel his return. They owed him money. They held the money as a weapon. **This is not inference. This is not a biographer's conclusion. This is the label's own founder, speaking about his own conduct, confirming that the withholding of owed royalties was a deliberate business strategy employed against the artist who had made the label commercially viable.**

This confession is, by itself, a complete case under Vayikra 19:13. The Hebrew **lo ta’ashoq** — do not oppress your neighbor — prohibits the use of a person's wages as a weapon of coercion. Art Rupe used Little Richard's unpaid royalties to try to force him back into the studio. The Torah names this as oppression, not business strategy. The

label founder names it as business strategy. The covenant names it as oppression. **The record is bilateral. The indictment is complete.**

The \$50 Publishing Rights and the Perpetual Masters

Little Richard sold his publishing rights to Specialty Records for \$50. The VICE account documents this from his biography. He later described the transaction as: *"Whoever heard cutting a penny in half! It didn't matter how many records you sold if you were Black. The publishing rights were sold to the record label before the record was even released."*

Publishing rights are the ongoing commercial property of a song. Every time **Tutti Frutti** is performed by a cover artist, licensed for a film or commercial, or played on radio, the publishing generates revenue. That revenue, for every song Little Richard recorded at Specialty, flowed to the label. **He wrote the songs. He sold the property rights to them for \$50 before he knew what they were worth. He received half a cent per record sold for the recordings.** The Beatles covered his songs. Paul McCartney acknowledged him as the foundation of everything the Beatles did vocally. The publishing revenue from Beatle covers of Little Richard songs — flowing to a company that had paid him \$50 for the rights — is incalculable.

The 1959 Settlement: Waiving All Future Royalties for \$11,000

In 1959, Little Richard sued Specialty Records for unpaid royalties. The UPI court documentation confirms: he had signed with Specialty in 1955 and granted ownership of his songs to the company in exchange for 50% of royalties. He sued in 1959 claiming he had received nothing. He **settled the Superior Court suit that year, accepting \$11,000 to waive his right to royalties from the sale of records.**

Eleven thousand dollars. In exchange for permanently waiving all royalties from the sale of every record he had made for Specialty Records. Every copy of Tutti Frutti ever sold after 1959. Every copy of Good Golly Miss Molly. Long Tall Sally. Lucille. Rip It Up. All of it. **\$11,000 for the permanent commercial rights to the catalog that defined rock and roll.** Why did he accept this? The same reason Bessie Smith accepted \$200 flat per session, the same reason Ma Rainey accepted the one-cent royalty, the same reason Robert Johnson walked into a hotel room for \$100. Because the people with the legal knowledge and the financial resources told him this was the deal, and he had no independent representation, no legal counsel advising him, and no leverage. He had been fighting for his money since 1957. He was tired. He took the \$11,000. He gave up the catalog.

The \$112 Million Lawsuit and the Unsatisfied Debt

In 1984, Little Richard filed a \$112 million lawsuit against Specialty Records, Art Rupe, Venice Music, and ATV Music for unpaid royalties going back decades. UPI reported: his attorney Arthur Pollock stated, *"In this case the money he should have received for the writing of the songs has been going to the music publishers and has been stopping there. He has never seen anything from that."*

The lawsuit was settled out of court in 1986 for an undisclosed amount. His son Danny Penniman told Rolling Stone that Little Richard had spoken often in his final years about how badly he had been ripped off by Specialty, and how bitter he was that *"despite his wild success — he'd never been paid the money he was due."* By the time he died in May 2020, Penniman said, his father had *"resigned himself to the fact that he would never get what he was owed."* Danny's final words on his father's relationship with the industry: *"He came to the reality of what it was: That's his life. In the later years, he was at peace with it."*

He was at peace with it. **The covenant is not at peace with it.** A man who gave the world Tutti Frutti at half a cent per record, who sold his publishing for \$50, whose royalties were withheld as leverage by the label's own founder, who settled a lawsuit for \$11,000 to waive all future rights, who picketed Hollywood Boulevard demanding his own money, who filed a \$112 million lawsuit 25 years later and settled for an undisclosed amount — that man arrived at peace with never being paid. The Torah's standard does not arrive at peace with that. Every dollar owed is in the permanent covenant record. His peace does not close the account.

SECTION THREE — THE THREE WITNESSES (DEVARIM 19:15)

Corroboration of the Record

This report contains the strongest evidentiary foundation in the series to date: the artist's own primary testimony on camera, the perpetrator's own primary confession on camera, a UPI court document, a VICE investigative account with named legal professionals, and the Rolling Stone documented testimony of his son. The Devarim 19:15 standard is exceeded on every charge.

WITNESS One: *Little Richard's own testimony — PBS American Masters documentary 'Little Richard: King and Queen of Rock n Roll': 'If you spoke for your money, you was a troublemaker. But if you just went along with the program, didn't say nothing, you was a good boy. Never a man — a good boy. Mind, the record company's not paying me my royalties. I had to work all the time.'* Also: *'Whoever heard cutting a penny in half! It didn't matter how many records you sold if you were Black.'* These are primary audio-visual testimonies preserved in a nationally broadcast PBS documentary.

WITNESS Two: *Art Rupe, founder of Specialty Records — PBS American Masters documentary (same production): 'We did everything trying to get him to come back, including withholding his royalties.'* This is the perpetrator's own on-camera confession that unpaid royalties were used as leverage. Additionally: *UPI Archives court document (1984) confirms Little Richard 'signed with Specialty Records in 1955 and granted ownership of his songs to the company in exchange for 50 percent of the royalties' and that he 'settled the Superior Court suit that year, accepting \$11,000 to waive his right to royalties from the sale of records.'* This is a primary legal filing documented by wire service journalism.

WITNESS Three: *VICE investigative account ('Black Artists Are Still Getting Ripped Off the Way Little Richard Was,' 2020, sourcing named music business professor Eric Holt of Belmont University, entertainment attorneys, and Black label executives): confirms*

Richard's father was murdered when he was 19; confirms he was washing dishes when he signed; confirms Tutti Frutti sold 200,000 copies in its first week and a half; confirms Richard received only a fraction of the proceeds; confirms his son Danny Penniman documented his father's lifelong bitterness and final resignation. Additionally: Rolling Stone review of the documentary confirms label exploitation; TheGrio documents the \$50 publishing rights sale and half-cent royalty rate.

Additional corroboration: Wikipedia (Little Richard article); New World Encyclopedia; Britannica; Encyclopedia.com biography. The core facts are confirmed independently across every biographical source.

SECTION FOUR — THE COVENANT ANALYSIS: WHAT THE TORAH SAYS

The Torah Charges — Applied to Little Richard

Charge One: Withholding Wages as a Weapon — Vayikra 19:13

"You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning."
— Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:13

Art Rupe said it himself: ***"We did everything trying to get him to come back, including withholding his royalties."*** This is the most explicit confirmation of Vayikra 19:13 in the entire series. The label did not merely fail to pay the wages. It ***deliberately held wages as a coercive weapon***. The Hebrew ***lo ta'ashoq*** — do not oppress — is violated the moment wages are used as leverage. Not merely the moment they are unpaid. The moment they are weaponized. Art Rupe confirmed on camera that Specialty Records weaponized Little Richard's unpaid royalties. **This is not inference. The covenant indictment writes itself from the perpetrator's own mouth.**

Charge Two: The \$50 Publishing Theft — Vayikra 19:35–36

"You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am Yahweh your Elohim."
— Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:35-36

A just balance. Little Richard sold his publishing rights — the ongoing commercial property of every song he had written — for \$50. Before the records were released. Before he knew what they were worth. Before he had any legal representation. **The transaction was conducted with false weights.** The label knew the commercial value of publishing rights. Little Richard did not. The Torah prohibits every commercial transaction in which one party's superior knowledge is used to extract assets from the other at a price that does not reflect the true value. \$50 for the publishing rights to ***Tutti Frutti*** and ***Good Golly Miss Molly*** and ***Long Tall Sally*** is not a market transaction. It is a false weight. The Torah names it explicitly and grounds the prohibition in *****Yahweh*****'s

own identity: *"I am Yahweh your Elohim."* The reminder that every transaction is witnessed by the One who made the standard.

Charge Three: The Infantilizing Language — Devarim 24:14–15

"You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns."

— Devarim (Deuteronomy) 24:14-15

Little Richard named the mechanism of the system's psychological control: ***"If you just went along with the program, didn't say nothing, you was a 'good boy.' Never a man — a 'good boy.'"*** The Torah's command is to treat the hired worker as *ach* — a brother — not as a dependent child to be managed. The language of *"good boy"* directed at a man who created music that changed the world is not merely demeaning. It is a covenant violation. It refuses the full humanity of the worker. It reduces the *zamar* carrier — the man through whom *****Yahweh***** moved to change the culture of his generation — to a category of obedient child whose good behavior is defined by not asking for what he is owed. **The Torah says the poor and needy worker must not be oppressed. The industry said the poor and needy worker must be manageable.** These are antithetical standards.

Charge Four: The \$11,000 Settlement — Shemot 23:6–8

"You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit. Keep far from a false charge... And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right."

— Shemot (Exodus) 23:6-8

Little Richard's 1959 lawsuit was settled for \$11,000 and a waiver of all future royalties. **A settlement that requires the poor person to surrender all future rights as a condition of receiving any portion of what they are owed is a perversion of justice.** The Torah prohibits the bribery of judges. But the principle extends to every transaction in which money is used to permanently foreclose a righteous claim. Specialty Records offered \$11,000 to permanently close all claims on every record Richard had ever made. He accepted, not because the terms were just but because he was poor, legally unrepresented, and had been fighting for three years without result. ***"You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit."*** The \$11,000 settlement was justice perverted. It was legal. It was a covenant violation. Both things are true.

SECTION FIVE — THE LIVING WITNESS: KEPHA ARCEMONT, 2026

A Blues Guitarist Reads the Record

Art Rupe said it on camera. I keep coming back to that. The founder of Specialty Records sat in front of a documentary filmmaker for PBS American Masters and said: "We did everything trying to get him to come back, including withholding his royalties." He said this. He said it as if it were a reasonable business decision. He said it without apparent shame. He said it because, in the world of the American music industry of the 1950s, withholding a Black artist's royalties to compel his continued labor was **a reasonable business decision**. The system was so normalized that the man who ran it could describe it on camera, decades later, without recognizing it as the covenant violation the Torah named 3,000 years before it happened.

◆ *I have been a musician since I was fourteen. I have worked in a system that has this dynamic in every generation. The label that owns the contract, the promoter that controls the room, the manager that holds the advance — they all have leverage the artist does not have. Little Richard described it perfectly: if you speak for your money, you're a troublemaker. If you stay quiet and accept less than you're owed, you're a 'good boy.' I have been in rooms where that dynamic was operating. Every working musician has been in those rooms. The only thing that has changed since Little Richard washed dishes in Macon is the sophistication of the contract language.*

He picketed on Hollywood Boulevard. **Famous Little Richard trying to get that famous money that he made so many years ago that he's never seen.** He said those words himself. He stood on a public street and demanded his own wages. And then he filed a \$112 million lawsuit. And then he settled out of court for an undisclosed amount. And then his son watched him arrive at peace with never being paid. **The man who gave the world Tutti Frutti and Long Tall Sally and Good Golly Miss Molly and Lucille arrived at peace with never being paid what he was owed.** The covenant does not arrive at peace with that. The peace belongs to Richard. The indictment belongs to the system. Both things stand.

◆ *Paul McCartney said Richard taught him his vocal style. Mick Jagger cited him. Jimi Hendrix toured in his band. Sam Phillips described wanting 'a white man with the Negro sound and the Negro feel' — and then produced Elvis to fill that vacancy while Little Richard, who already had the sound and the feel, received half a cent per record. The industry built its empire on his foundation. He was paid a dishwasher's share of it. I am a blues guitarist who stands in the tradition he helped build. The covenant requires me to say plainly: what was done to Little Richard is the reason I always read every contract before I sign it, always retain legal counsel before any significant deal, and never assume that the man with the recording equipment is interested in my wellbeing.*

SECTION SIX — THE COVENANT VERDICT: THE JUDGMENT OF YAHWEH

Yahweh's Record on Little Richard

The covenant record of Little Richard's exploitation is established by the strongest evidentiary foundation in this series: the artist's own primary testimony, the perpetrator's own on-camera confession, a UPI wire service legal document, and the documented testimony of his son. The charges:

One: Half a cent per record sold. Publishing rights sold for \$50. Royalties never paid. Vayikra 19:13 — wages withheld from the hired worker. Established by Richard's own testimony and the UPI court record.

Two: Royalties withheld as leverage to compel return to the studio. Vayikra 19:13 — oppression. Established by Art Rupe's own confession on camera.

Three: \$11,000 settlement to waive all future royalties on the entire Specialty catalog. Shemot 23:6–8 — justice perverted against the poor in his lawsuit. Established by UPI court documentation.

Four: \$112 million lawsuit 25 years later — settled for undisclosed amount, never fully compensated. Richard died having never been paid what he was owed. Mishlei 13:23 — the fallow ground of the poor yields much food; injustice sweeps it away. Established by his son's documented testimony in Rolling Stone.

YAHWEH'S COVENANT VERDICT ON THE TREATMENT OF LITTLE RICHARD: The Architect of Rock and Roll — a 22-year-old dishwasher supporting twelve siblings after his father's murder — signed a contract at half a cent per record, sold his publishing rights for \$50, had his royalties withheld by the label's founder as leverage (his own words, on camera), settled a lawsuit for \$11,000 to permanently waive all future rights, picketed Hollywood Boulevard demanding his own money, filed a \$112 million lawsuit 25 years later, and died having never been paid what he was owed. Every one of these acts stands in violation of Vayikra 19:13, Vayikra 19:35-36, Devarim 24:14-15, and Shemot 23:6-8. The covenant verdict is entered on the basis of bilateral primary testimony. It does not expire.

Art Rupe, founder of Specialty Records, died in 2022 at the age of 97. He built a commercially successful label on the music of Black artists including Little Richard, Sam Cooke, and Lloyd Price. He lived comfortably for decades on the revenue generated by men he had paid half a cent per record. He confessed on camera to withholding their royalties as leverage. **Yahweh heard every note Little Richard ever sang for that label. Yahweh counted every penny that should have been paid and was not.** The account is open. It has always been open.

"But You do see, for You note mischief and vexation, that You may take it into Your hands; to You the helpless commits himself; You have been the helper of the fatherless."

— Tehillim (Psalms) 10:14

He was a boy when his father was murdered. He washed dishes to feed twelve people. He called a record company every week for a year from a pay phone in Macon, Georgia, because he could think of no other door. ***To You the helpless commits***

himself. **Yahweh** saw every call. He saw the dishwater on Richard's hands when he signed the contract. He saw the \$50 check for the publishing rights. He saw Art Rupe sit across the table and know what he was taking. **The helpless committed himself to Yahweh. Yahweh has not forgotten. Selah.**

SERIES NOTES

Next in series: Report No. 10 — Ruth Brown (1928–2006). The Queen of R&B who powered Atlantic Records through its early years, received virtually nothing in royalties for decades, and spent most of her career fighting for what she was owed — becoming one of the most important advocates for artists' rights before the end of her life.

Series roster: Reports 1–9 complete. Reports 10–16 pending: Ruth Brown, Sam Cooke, Mary Wells, James Brown, Curtis Mayfield, Sam Moore, and the hip-hop era to 2026.

Selah.

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