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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. 11 of an Ongoing Series

SAM COOKE

1931 – 1964

The King of Soul — The First Black Artist to Own His Label

Built SAR Records and Kags Music to own his masters and publishing — understood every trap this series documents — murdered at 33 under disputed circumstances — coroner's inquest lasted fifteen minutes — his manager Allen Klein acquired his catalog within three months of his death — his estate worth \$100 million in 2015 — Cooke himself died without a will

NOTE: This report applies the disputed evidence protocol. The circumstances of Cooke's death are documented as disputed. The post-death catalog capture is documented as established fact.

March 2026 · Kepha Arcemont, Elder and Founder

SECTION ONE — THE GIFT: WHO YAHWEH MADE HIM

Biography: The King of Soul and the First Black Music Capitalist

Samuel Cook was born January 22, 1931, in Clarksdale, Mississippi — son of Reverend Charles Cook, a Baptist minister, and Annie Mae Cook. He had seven siblings. In 1933, the family moved to Chicago. By the age of nine he was singing in a family group called the Singing Children. At fourteen he was the lead singer of the Highway Q.C.'s, a gospel quartet. In 1950, at nineteen, he joined the Soul Stirrers — one of the most celebrated gospel groups in America — as their lead vocalist. He was already, by every account, a singer unlike anything anyone had heard.

His voice carried something specific that no technical description fully captures: a quality that seemed to move between vulnerability and authority in the same phrase, that could carry complete emotional truth in a single note's bend. He made his first secular recording under the alias *Dale Cook* in 1956 — hiding his identity from his gospel fan base. ***You Send Me*** was released in September 1957 under his real name on Keen Records. It reached number one on both the Billboard pop chart and the R&B chart. It stayed at number one on the R&B chart for six weeks.

Between 1957 and 1964 — eight years — Sam Cooke released 29 singles that charted in the Top 40 of the Billboard Hot 100, including ***Chain Gang, Wonderful World, Twistin' the Night Away, Another Saturday Night, Bring It On Home to Me, and A Change Is Gonna Come***. He performed to sell-out crowds on both sides of the racial divide — refusing to play segregated venues and, in doing so, contributing to what ABKCO describes as “*one of the first real efforts in civil disobedience.*” He was publicly aligned with Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali. The FBI maintained a file on him.

And he understood the business. Not partially. Not as a secondary consideration. Sam Cooke understood that the gift without the infrastructure of ownership was a gift that would be captured by those who controlled the infrastructure. He had watched what happened to the artists around him. He read. He studied. He acted. ***He was the first African American artist to own a record label.*** He was the first major Black performer to secure ownership of his master recordings in his RCA contract. He built a publishing company to own his compositions. He built a management firm. He understood, in 1960, what it would take forty more years of artists' rights movement to persuade the industry to acknowledge: **the catalog is the real asset, and the artist must own it.**

◆ *Sam Cooke understood every trap documented in this series. He saw what happened to the artists who came before him. He built the structures to protect himself from those traps. He was murdered at 33. His manager acquired his catalog within three months. The estate he built — the infrastructure he erected specifically to prevent the capture of his creative inheritance — was captured anyway. The covenant does not call this coincidence. It calls it the system responding to a Black man who had learned to protect what he created.*

Born	January 22, 1931 — Clarksdale, Mississippi; raised Chicago
Gospel career	Soul Stirrers lead vocalist from 1950; one of the most celebrated gospel groups in America
Secular breakthrough	You Send Me (1957) — #1 pop and #1 R&B
Pop career	29 Top 40 Billboard Hot 100 hits in 8 years (1957–1964)
Ownership	First Black artist to own a record label (SAR Records, 1961); owned his master recordings via RCA contract; founded Kags Music publishing company
Civil rights	Refused to perform segregated concerts; associated with Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali; FBI maintained file
Manager	Allen Klein appointed 1963 to manage SAR Records and Kags Music
Death	December 11, 1964 — Hacienda Motel, South Los Angeles — shot by motel manager Bertha Franklin — age 33
Inquest	Fifteen minutes — ruled justifiable homicide — disputed by family and associates for 60 years
Post-death	Catalog acquired by Allen Klein (ABKCO) within 3 months; estate worth \$100M in 2015
Recognition	Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inaugural class 1986. Grammy Lifetime Achievement 1999.

SECTION TWO — THE ARCHITECTURE OF PROTECTION

What Sam Cooke Built to Protect Himself

The Sam Cooke report requires a section no other report in this series has needed: a full account of what he built before documenting what was done to it. Because the wound in Cooke's case is not the same as the wound in every previous report. Those artists were exploited because they lacked ownership, legal knowledge, and institutional infrastructure. **Cooke had all three** and was exploited anyway. The wound here is not ignorance. It is the removal of the protection a man had consciously built around himself and his creative inheritance.

SAR Records: The First Black-Owned Major Label

In 1961, Sam Cooke founded SAR Records with his business associate J.W. Alexander and road manager Roy Crain. SAR — variously interpreted as Sam and

Alex Records or Sam, Alex and Roy Records — was the first record label owned and operated by an African American artist at a major commercial level. The label signed Bobby Womack and the Valentinos, Billy Preston, Johnnie Taylor, the Simms Twins, and the Soul Stirrers. The Valentinos' ***It's All Over Now*** was later covered by the Rolling Stones. **Cooke was not merely a recording artist. He was a record executive.** He oversaw production. He developed other artists. He built an operation.

Kags Music: The Publishing Infrastructure

Alongside SAR Records, Cooke founded Kags Music — his publishing company — to own the publishing rights to his compositions and the compositions of his signed artists. The lesson of every previous artist in this series was explicit in his decision: the publishing company is where the long-term value of the creative work lives. Kags Music meant that every time a Sam Cooke song was covered, licensed, performed, or broadcast, the publishing revenue flowed to Cooke's company rather than to a label executive.

The RCA Contract: Owning the Masters

When Cooke signed with RCA Victor in 1960, he negotiated an unprecedented provision: he retained ownership of the copyright to his master recordings. He also established a separate corporation, Tracey Ltd. — named after his daughter — as the entity through which his RCA recordings would be produced. In the framework of that deal, Cooke received preferred stock in Tracey Ltd. in lieu of a cash advance. **He was not a recording artist for hire. He was a business owner in a production relationship with a distributor.** The distinction is everything. The artist for hire owns nothing. The business owner retains the asset after the distribution relationship ends. Sam Cooke understood this. He had studied the trap. He had built the architecture specifically to avoid it. He was 32 years old when he died. His estate in 2015 — fifty years after his death — was worth \$100 million. **Everything he had built to protect his creative inheritance survived him. The question is who inherited it.** And the answer to that question is the wound.

SECTION THREE — THE WOUND: WHAT WAS DONE TO HIM

The Death, the Fifteen-Minute Inquest, and the Three-Month Acquisition

December 11, 1964: The Disputed Death

Sam Cooke died at approximately 2:35 a.m. on December 11, 1964, at the Hacienda Motel in South Los Angeles. He was 33 years old. The official account: he had accompanied a woman, Elisa Boyer, to the motel; Boyer fled with most of his clothing while he was in the bathroom; Cooke, enraged, went to the motel manager's

office demanding to know where she was; the manager, Bertha Franklin, shot him once; he charged her; she beat him with a broomstick before he fell and died.

The coroner's inquest lasted fifteen minutes. The ruling was justifiable homicide. **The case was closed faster than it takes to watch a music video.** Cooke's family and friends disputed the account immediately. Those who saw his body before the funeral reported severe bruising inconsistent with the official account. No detailed forensic investigation was conducted. The woman who had accompanied him, Elisa Boyer, was later convicted of robbery in an unrelated incident — a fact that raised questions about the reliability of her account but was not available at the time of the inquest.

Disputed Elements: *Physical injuries on body described by family as inconsistent with official account. Inquest lasted 15 minutes. Elisa Boyer (key witness) later convicted of robbery. FBI maintained file on Cooke due to civil rights associations. Allen Klein acquired catalog within 3 months. Cooke had been in early stages of dismissing Klein, per multiple accounts. These elements are documented as disputed, not as established fact.*

This report applies the disputed evidence protocol established in Report No. 4 (Billie Holiday). **The covenant research standard requires naming what is established and naming what is disputed separately.** What is established: Sam Cooke died on December 11, 1964, by gunshot, at age 33. The official ruling was justifiable homicide. The inquest lasted fifteen minutes. What is disputed: every other element of the account. **The covenant indictment in this report rests on what is established** — the capture of his catalog — not on what remains disputed.

Three Months: Allen Klein Acquires the Catalog

Within three months of Sam Cooke's death, Allen Klein — his manager, appointed in 1963 — had acquired control of Cooke's entire catalog: SAR Records, Kags Music, and the Tracey Ltd. masters. This is confirmed across multiple independent sources. The Heirs and Successes account documents: Klein had established the Tracey Ltd. corporation that held Cooke's RCA masters, with Cooke as president. After Cooke's death without a will, Klein was positioned to acquire the assets. **Sam Cooke died intestate.** He had built the most sophisticated ownership structure any artist in this series ever constructed — and he died without a formal succession plan for what happened to that structure if he were gone.

Klein's company ABKCO Music and Records now owns and administers the rights to Sam Cooke's recordings and publishing. The Nolazine documented account confirms that Cooke had discovered, just before his death, that Klein had *"covertly transferred ownership of Tracey Limited — Cooke's record label — into Klein's own name."* Multiple accounts indicate Cooke was in the process of firing Klein when he died. The timeline — discovery of the covert transfer, beginning of the dismissal process, death, fifteen-minute inquest, three-month acquisition of the entire catalog — is the covenant record of what happened to the man who had built the most comprehensive ownership structure in Black music history.

The No-Will Inheritance: The Covenant Principle Violated

Sam Cooke died without a will. He had built SAR Records, Kags Music, Tracey Ltd., and a catalog worth \$100 million. He had studied the music industry with the seriousness of a legal scholar. He had protected himself from every trap the previous ten artists in this series fell into. **He did not write a will.** The Bemidbar 27 inheritance principle — the covenant's explicit framework for ensuring that a man's creative and material legacy passes to his bloodline — was not operative because there was no legal instrument to activate it. His widow Barbara and his children existed. His family's claim was legitimate. But without a will, the legal structure he had built — the corporations, the publishing company, the label — was subject to the commercial mechanisms of acquisition that Klein was positioned to execute. **The protector of the gift left no succession plan for the gift.** The system moved in immediately.

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

Corroboration of the Record

WITNESS One: *Wikipedia (Sam Cooke article, extensively sourced and reviewed): confirms Cooke founded SAR Records in 1961 as 'among the first modern Black performers and composers to attend to the business side of his musical career'; confirms 'In 1963, Cooke signed a five-year contract for Allen Klein to manage Kags Music and SAR Records'; confirms death on December 11, 1964, ruled justifiable homicide; confirms coroner's inquest ruling; confirms posthumous catalog activity. This is the most thoroughly sourced and reviewed public encyclopedia available.*

WITNESS Two: *New World Encyclopedia (academic reference): confirms 'The rights to the recordings and the publishing were bought up shortly thereafter by Allen Klein, who was Cooke's last manager'; confirms 'Cooke died under precarious circumstances at the young age of 33... the court verdict was justifiable homicide, though many believe that crucial details did not come out in court or were buried afterward'; confirms 'details of the case involving Sam Cooke's death are still in dispute'; confirms SAR Records was dissolved shortly after his death. This is an independently verified academic reference confirming post-death catalog acquisition.*

WITNESS Three: *Heirs and Successes (estate law documentation): confirms Klein established Tracey Ltd. as the corporation holding Cooke's RCA masters; confirms Cooke died intestate (without a will); confirms Klein gained control of Cooke's entire catalog after his death; confirms the estate was worth \$100 million in 2015; confirms Cooke had been in early stages of dismissing Klein at the time of his death. Additionally: JC Interesting Things documentary documentation confirms the coroner's inquest lasted fifteen minutes; confirms Klein acquired the catalog within three months.*

Additional corroboration: ABKCO Music & Records (the company that now owns and administers the rights confirms Klein's control); SAR Records Wikipedia article; Sam Cooke Fan Club documented history of SAR Records; Nolazine account of Tracey Ltd. covert transfer.

SECTION FIVE — THE COVENANT ANALYSIS: WHAT THE TORAH SAYS

The Torah Charges — Applied to Sam Cooke

Charge One: The Covert Transfer of Ownership — Vayikra 19:11

"You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another."

— Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:11

Allen Klein covertly transferred ownership of Tracey Ltd. — the corporation holding Sam Cooke's master recordings — into his own name while serving as Cooke's manager. Multiple sources confirm Cooke discovered this transfer before his death. **A manager who secretly transfers his client's corporate assets into his own name while employed as that client's agent is a covenant violator under every applicable standard.** The Hebrew *lo tignov* does not require a criminal conviction. It requires a taking. The covert transfer of Tracey Ltd. was a taking. The fact that it was executed through corporate mechanisms rather than physical force does not alter the covenant analysis. *Lo teshageru* — do not deal falsely — applies to every transaction in which a fiduciary uses his position of trust to redirect assets from his principal to himself. This is documented. The principal discovered it. The principal was dead within weeks.

Charge Two: The Fifteen-Minute Inquest — Shemot 23:6

"You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit."

— Shemot (Exodus) 23:6

Sam Cooke was not poor. But the Torah's principle of *lo tateh mishpat* — do not pervert judgment — applies to every legal proceeding regardless of the wealth of the subject. A coroner's inquest into the death of one of the most prominent Black musicians in America, in a disputed shooting in a Los Angeles motel, that lasted fifteen minutes and produced a ruling of justifiable homicide without serious forensic examination, is a perverted judgment. **Not because the conclusion was necessarily wrong** — the covenant honesty standard does not allow us to assert what the full investigation would have found — **but because fifteen minutes is not a judgment. It is a formality.** The Torah demands that judgment be taken seriously. Fifteen minutes is evidence that it was not.

Charge Three: The Inheritance Unclaimed — Bemidbar 27:8–9

"If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers."

— Bemidbar (Numbers) 27:8-9

Sam Cooke had children. He had a widow. He had a family to whom the inheritance of his creative work belonged under every covenant principle of succession. The daughters of Zelophchad in Bemidbar 27 established the principle that the inheritance must go to the bloodline — and that when the existing legal framework threatens to prevent this, the community must adjust the framework to honor the principle. **Sam**

Cooke died without a will. The corporations he built — SAR Records, Kags Music, Tracey Ltd. — became available for acquisition by the man who managed them. The catalog went to Klein's company. The \$100 million estate that exists today exists under the administration of ABKCO, not under the administration of Cooke's bloodline. **The inheritance that should have gone to his children went elsewhere.** The covenant charges the one who failed to provide for the succession and the one who moved into the vacuum. Both failures are in the record.

Covenant Reflection: The Man Who Knew

Sam Cooke is the only artist in this series who understood every trap documented in every previous report and built specific institutional protections against each of them. He understood Joplin's one-cent royalty problem — and built a publishing company. He understood Bessie Smith's master recording problem — and secured ownership of his masters in his RCA contract. He understood Robert Johnson's no-estate, no-will problem — though he did not fully solve it. He understood Big Mama Thornton's cover system problem — and sought to control his own distribution. The question that the covenant record raises is not whether Sam Cooke was careful. He was the most legally aware artist in this series by a significant margin. The question is **what system destroys the most careful man in the room? A system that can survive legal awareness and institutional protection by targeting the man outside the institution — in a fifteen-minute inquest, in a three-month acquisition — is a system whose covenant indictment does not rest on the ignorance of its victims.** Ruth Brown was ignorant of contract law. Little Richard was ignorant of publishing rights. Sam Cooke was ignorant of nothing. And his catalog is still in the hands of Allen Klein's company.

SECTION SIX — THE LIVING WITNESS: KEPHA ARCEMONT, 2026

A Blues Guitarist Reads the Record

A Change Is Gonna Come. He recorded it in 1963. It was released as a B-side in February 1964, two months after his death. It is now recognized as one of the great anthems of the Civil Rights Movement, one of the greatest songs in the American canon, a piece of music that carries the full weight of what it means to live in a country that promises freedom and delivers something else entirely.

◆ *Sam Cooke knew what was coming. Not his death specifically — though the line 'It's been a long time coming, but I know a change is gonna come' carries a weight that feels prophetic in retrospect. He knew what the music industry had done to everyone who came before him. He built the protection. He negotiated the contract. He owned the label. He owned the publishing. He was the most legally sophisticated Black artist America had produced. He was 33 years old. He was shot in a motel in South Los Angeles. His catalog*

was acquired within three months. The change he was singing about has still not fully come.

200,000 people lined up for more than four city blocks to view his body in Chicago. 5,000 people came to the second funeral service at Mount Sinai Baptist Church in Los Angeles. Ray Charles performed at the service, standing in for a grief-stricken singer who could not go on. **The man who had built the most sophisticated ownership structure in Black music history was mourned by hundreds of thousands of people who understood that something irreplaceable had been removed from the world.** The fifteen-minute inquest did not reflect that understanding. The three-month acquisition did not reflect that understanding. **Yahweh's record reflects it.**

◆ I am a former New Orleans firefighter. I have seen what it looks like when a death is investigated carefully and when it is not. A fifteen-minute inquest into the shooting death of a 33-year-old Black man at the height of his cultural and financial power, in a contested account involving a woman who later went to prison for robbery, is not a careful investigation. It is a closed door. The covenant research standard requires me to name disputed evidence as disputed. I name it. I also name what is not disputed: Sam Cooke was 33 years old, he was building something, and the man who managed that something was positioned to own it within three months of the building stopping.

SECTION SEVEN — THE COVENANT VERDICT: THE JUDGMENT OF YAHWEH

Yahweh's Record on Sam Cooke

The covenant verdict in this report is entered with the explicit acknowledgment that the full truth of December 11, 1964 is not in the public record. The fifteen-minute inquest did not produce it. Sixty years of investigation, dispute, and family questioning have not conclusively produced it. The covenant research standard — Devarim 19:15 — requires the minimum of two or three witnesses for each charge. The disputed elements of the death cannot meet that standard for a definitive covenant indictment. They are named as disputed and left in the permanent record as open. What can be charged:

COVENANT CHARGE ONE: Allen Klein covertly transferred ownership of Tracey Ltd. — the corporation holding Sam Cooke's master recordings — into his own name while serving as Cooke's fiduciary manager. Cooke discovered this transfer. He was in the process of dismissing Klein. He died. Klein acquired the entire catalog within three months. Vayikra 19:11 — you shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely. The judgment is entered on the covert transfer. It does not require the death to be part of a conspiracy to be a covenant violation. The transfer itself is the violation.

COVENANT CHARGE TWO: The coroner's inquest into Sam Cooke's death lasted fifteen minutes. A man of national cultural significance, shot in a disputed account in a Los Angeles motel, received fifteen minutes of official inquiry. Shemot 23:6 — you shall not pervert the justice due to the one in your judgment. Fifteen minutes is a perverted judgment regardless of what the full investigation might have found. The judgment is entered on the inadequacy of the proceeding, not on a determination of its outcome.

COVENANT CHARGE THREE: Sam Cooke died without a will. The inheritance that should have passed to his bloodline under Bemidbar 27 was not formally protected. His creative estate — SAR Records, Kags Music, Tracey Ltd., a catalog worth \$100 million — was acquired by his manager's company. His children received a fraction of what the covenant framework of inheritance would have directed to them. The judgment is entered. The failure to provide for succession and the acquisition that followed both stand in the covenant record.

He recorded ***A Change Is Gonna Come*** in 1963. It was inspired by Bob Dylan's ***Blowin' in the Wind*** — a white folk singer's song about Black suffering that made Cooke feel he had been derelict in his prophetic responsibility. **He went home and wrote his own song about what his people had lived.** It is now considered one of the fifty greatest songs ever recorded. He was 32 when he recorded it. He was 33 when he died. ***It's been a long time coming, but I know a change is gonna come.*** Yahweh heard that line when it was written. Yahweh hears it still. The change Sam Cooke was singing about is still coming. The covenant record of everything that stood in its way — from Scott Joplin's one-cent contract to Sam Cooke's fifteen-minute inquest — is complete through Report No. 11 and continues.

"The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, because Yahweh has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

— Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 61:1

Sam Cooke carried the anointing. The poor heard good news in his voice. The brokenhearted were bound up. The captives heard their own experience named and dignified in language so precise and beautiful that sixty years later it still stops a room. ***Yahweh anoints those He sends.*** What the system did to the one He sent is in the permanent record. ***Selah.***

SERIES NOTES

Next in series: Report No. 12 — Mary Wells (1943–1992). Motown’s first superstar — who scored #1 with My Guy at 21, left the label for a promised better deal, was blacklisted from radio, and died of cancer at 49 with nothing.

Series roster: Reports 1–11 complete. Reports 12–16 pending: Mary Wells, James Brown, Curtis Mayfield, Sam Moore, and the hip-hop era to 2026.

Selah.

*Miqdash Bethel Covenant Assembly · Pearl River, Louisiana · March 2026
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