Creative Labour, Race, and R&B Record Royalties

"I'll Never Never Never Be Able to Retire, No Matter How Many Records I Sold?"

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170 St. George St.

Between the mid-1980s and the early 2000s, a number of aging R&B singers—and a handful of political, legal, and celebrity advocates—undertook a series of efforts referred to at the time by sympathetic journalists as "royalty reform." Royalty reform confirmed and detailed practices of fraud and exploitation at work in the 1950s and '60s R&B record industry and achieved several landmark victories. Nevertheless, royalty reform has gone unaddressed by scholars until now. This presentation examines one of these episodes, the nine-year class action lawsuit initiated by Sam Moore (of Sam & Dave) against AFTRA's Health and Retirement Funds. A central conceit of the presentation (and the broader research project it represents) is that royalty reform not only gave voice and some measure of reparations to a racially and economically marginalized group, it also provides scholars with a new window on royalties as a core mechanism or apparatus of theracialized political economy of music- and culture-making.

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