

Copyright Termination / Reversion Rights

"You might have signed it away. But you can get it back."

Under U.S. copyright law, authors and artists who transfer or license their rights can often reclaim those rights after 35 years. This is known as the Copyright Termination Right—a powerful legal tool designed to give creators a second chance at ownership.

How It Works:

- If you signed a copyright transfer or license agreement on or after January 1, 1978, you may be eligible to terminate that grant 35 years later under 17 U.S.C. § 203.
- You must file a written notice within a 5-year window that starts 35 years after the original agreement date.
- The notice must be filed with the U.S. Copyright Office and sent to the current rights holder between two and ten years before the effective termination date.

Example:

A songwriter who gave full publishing rights to a record label in 1990 may choose to terminate that agreement in 2025, reclaiming ownership of their music and renegotiating royalties, licensing, or streaming deals—this time, on their terms.

Artist Takeaway:

- Even if you were underpaid or unaware at the time of the deal, you are not stuck forever.
- These rights can't be waived in contracts—even major labels and studios must honor them.
- Plan ahead: Use your estate plan to notify heirs of this opportunity so your legacy isn't permanently signed away.

Ownership can come full circle. Reclaim it when the law gives you the chance.

Disclaimer:

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