The James Brown Estate Battle kept probate lawyers busy since the Godfather of Soul died early Christmas morning, 2006. Mr. Brown left behind at least 4 women he had married, along with 6 children through marriage and 3 others who may or may not have been fathered by Brown from women he hadn't married.

In death Brown was as much an enigma as he was in life. In the process of making plans for family and friends, Brown left ongoing legal problems with befuddling wills. In 2000, James Brown created a will covering his personal property. He then used a different estate planning attorney to create an irrevocable living trust to pass his musical legacy, image rights, businesses, and his South Carolina Island Estate to a charity to benefit underprivileged students.

Some of his children were not happy with so much of his property passing to charity. Others wanted to honor his wishes. Some challenged the trustee and estate administrators for improper management. At the end of the day, Brown's total estate is valued at around $80 million - but with substantial debt. There is value there, but it can only grow if his image and song rights are properly managed. The question is whether this cast of characters will be able to manage what they've been bequeathed.

Brown's last wife was Tomi Rae Hynie, a former backing singer, who married to him five years before he died. The problem in her case was that Hynie was still technically married to a Pakistani man whom she claimed wed her only to earn a Green Card. That marriage was eventually annulled - after her marriage to Brown. Brown, reportedly, was very unhappy when he learned about it and announced in August 2003 that he and Hynie were separating. James Brown II, was born in 2001, even though Brown insisted he'd had a vasectomy in 1984 so it seemed Brown did not want to leave anything to Hynie. She was not mentioned in the will or trust. Neither was her son, James Brown II.

In South Carolina when a spouse or child comes along after a will or trust is created, the family members get a share in the estate and trust, unless the estate planning document(s) expressly disinherited them. This gave Hynie and James II good grounds in the battle. The first question was: Could Hynie qualify for this legal right when the marriage may not have been valid? And, the second question - apparently first raised by Brown himself before he died - is whether James II was really his son.

With all these claims, lawsuits, allegations and innuendos, the various estate, trust and litigation attorneys worked out a comprehensive settlement. The feuding family members agreed that 50 percent of Brown's property and rights would go to charity as he wanted, 25 percent to Hynie (with an acknowledgment that she was a lawful widow), and the final quarter passing to some of Brown's adult children. The settlement also recognized James II as a legitimate child and heir.

"I am so relieved and happy that the court has approved this settlement," Rae said. "I want to be able to work with the trustees and other Brown family members to promote James Brown's legacy." Deanna Brown, the singer's daughter, said: "It has been a struggle, but God has blessed us and we are thankful. We look forward to working towards the goals of our father by providing education scholarships for impoverished students and his own grandchildren, and

making his home a museum for the world to come and see."

The Brown family's assets can be royalties from his 800 songs and proceeds from sale of his 60-acre, riverfront estate on Beech Island, South Carolina. In the meantime, possible sources of revenue for Brown's legacy include – "A Tribute to James Brown" tour managed by Bootsy Collins, who played in Brown's backup band, the J.B.'s in 1970 and 1971. The tour is scheduled a September 25 start. Millions of dollars may also come from a biopic director Spike Lee is preparing about Brown's life.

(William Reed –www.BlackPressInternational.com)