

American icon: johnny cash



The man in black, as he was called, was an artist idolized by millions in his time. He wrote songs that inspired his fans, and was one of the most influential country singers in history. Born the son of a poor cotton farmer, he overcame poverty to become an American icon and one of the most recognizable names of both his genre, and outside of it. He lived an unruly life, riddled with drug abuse and addiction. He suffered pains that many people could only imagine, but he still managed to make it to the top.

Even then, trouble seemed to follow him, but his fans loved him in spite of his hardships. In death, he lives on, immortalized by his music. His fans continue to worship him, we continue to sing along to the songs he wrote, and his face will be etched into our memories for all of eternity. Other than his musical genius, Johnny Cash was not a man that most would consider a role model. He did not lead an honorable life, in fact in his youth his behavior was seemingly uncontrollable. So what was it then that took him from a simple poor boy in the south and shot him up to iconic status?

While he was a rebel, it was not his rebellious attitude. Even though he was famous, it was not necessarily his fame or the amount of money he had earned. Instead, it was more of the connection that he had with his audience. With his success, Johnny left his impoverished life behind him, but he never could separate himself from his roots or his past. He represented the all of things inside of us that we are ashamed of, and he encompassed a sense of sympathy for those flaws that touched everyone who saw his face or heard him sing.

Johnny Cash is an icon because he was a real person, and he never acted like anything else. Johnny Cash started his life in the cotton fields of Arkansas.

His family was a poor, struggling farming family. His situation was typical for the time. He and his family were hard working people trying to pull out of the depression, stressed to make ends meet. After high school, he enlisted in the military and served in Germany, returning a few years later to be married. He worked hard, and soon he was signed by a record label and making the hits we all know and love.

He toured the country, led a very busy life, and after a while drugs began to take over. After cheating on his wife, the two were divorced, leaving Johnny to spin out of control. His drug use took its toll, he spent nights in jail, and his career began to suffer because of his addiction. Eventually though, he got back on his feet when he married his second wife, June Carter. Against all odds, he managed to overcome his own downfalls to live a truly successful life. He became famous for songs such as 'Folsom Prison Blues', 'I Walk the Line', 'Ring of Fire', and 'Man in Black'.

Johnny Cash was even eventually awarded for his career by an induction in to both the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Country Music Hall of Fame. Following his death, the film version of his life was made entitled, 'Walk the Line'. His story is one that we can all relate to, the classic guy who battles the troubles of life to end up on top. Everyone wants their life to end up the way that Johnny's did. He was an American dream poster child. While his story is indeed inspiring, it is not the primary reason that so many people loved him, and continue to love him today.

Instead, it is more the result of this interesting life that Johnny portrayed on stage, both in his appearance and in the words he spoke and sang. The secret to his success, and therefore his iconic status in our country, was the

fact that he never forgot the problems of his past. He was true to them, and he wore them on his face and in the way he dressed. He sang and spoke of them, and he loved the people who had made mistakes just as he had. Johnny Cash was called the man in black, and is famous by the nickname. The only color he ever wore was black, from head to toe.

He even wrote a song entitled, ' Man in Black', in which he spoke of the poor, the homeless, prisoners, and people who never knew Jesus. He wrote about the dead and the good people who die each day. He told the world that he wore black for the people in unfortunate situations, understanding each one of them, and feeling their pain. He wore black to remind us all of the people who were living such terrible lives. He connected with people in this way, drawing them in, and forcing them to love him despite the mistakes he had made himself. His face never cracked a smile.

Instead it was gloomy and sorrowful. His entire appearance gave off the impression that he had experienced a life full of pain and suffering, and it was easy to recognize those feelings in some of the music that he wrote. He was real, unlike the stars we tend to look up to today who never acknowledge the mistakes that they have made. Rather than putting up a fake exterior, Johnny was never afraid to be true to who he was, hence allowing others to feel comfortable with him, and to be as real as he was. More importantly, Johnny never thought that he was better than the people who idolized him.

He was no different from his fans, nor did his life hold any more value than theirs. He did not act as though he was any different from anyone that he sang to. In the height of his career he visited Folsom Prison and San Quentin,

and even recorded while he was there. The prisoners adored him just as much as everyone else did because to them, it seemed as though Johnny was just a regular guy. That is how he came across to everyone, and most likely that is the reason that his fans could relate to him the way they did.

He was a typical guy, who had lived a difficult life, and who had worked hard to become the idol that he was. People respected him, tossing aside the mistakes that he had made because he was down to earth and real. He did not hide his flaws. Rather he inspired others to embrace their own imperfections and to rise above them. Johnny Cash was an amazing man, and that is why he has become an American icon. In today's society, musicians tend to think that they are better than the people who brought them to fame in the first place. Johnny however, welcomed his fans.

He used his dark, dreary outward appearance to portray a life of bad decisions. He was mysterious, but sympathetic in that he knew that each person in the audience had made mistakes just as he had, and he used that truth to connect with people. He sang songs in which he spoke of his past, rather than hiding from it. Most importantly, he treated others as though they were no different than he was, no matter how famous he became. Johnny Cash is and forever will be an American icon simply because he was a real person who did not pretend to be anything other than who he was.