

Example of walk the line research paper

[Economics](#), [Money](#)



Introduction:

This film is one of the great country movies since it deals with the life of the legend Johnny Cash who transformed his life from one full of dereliction and destitution into a hugely successful one being a country musician. First and foremost, the film deals with recollections and is very adept at creating situations where one muses and reflects on the past as an intrinsic part of one's musical and life development. The film starts off with Cash preparing for a gig at the Folsom State Prison in Arkansas where Cash begins to recollect his earlier life. Probably the most famous episode in Cash's life, this experiment was something which was very daring at the time but it cemented Cash's place in history as one of the giants of the country music age. This gig is defined as the seminal point in Johnny Cash's life and we observe that the film glorifies this part to create a certain halo like judgement on the singer himself.

In fact several musicians have played in prisons after this bold step, most notably the speed metal band Metallica who played a gig in San Quentin Prison in California which was also very well received. However the Cash life story is ultimately different from all this and we have an honest to goodness portrait here which is well acted out by the indefatigable Joaquin Phoenix who is as far away from his role as Commodus in Gladiator as one can possibly imagine. The thesis is that the concert was a seminal point in Cash's life as an artist and on a personal level and this is backed up in this film.

Plot and discussion:

The film is based on a series of recollections of the singer's youth growing up in hard scrabble poverty as the son of a sharecropper on a cotton farm in Dyess, Arkansas. The young boy was known as J R around the house and was quite good at singing hymnals while his brother who was called Jack was training to become a pastor. A tragic incident then occurs where Jack was working with a saw and unfortunately ends up injuring himself, dying of his injuries in the process. This creates a huge problem for J R in his already estranged relationship with his father and the son ends up enlisting in the US Air Force in the year 1950. He uses the name Johnny Cash for enlistment and begins dabbling around with guitars for his own personal enjoyment. Around 1952 he begins writing songs and one of these ends up being the famous ' Folsom Prison Blues' which will feature later on in the film.

After ending up discharged from the air force, Cash decides to marry his girlfriend and both move to Tennessee where Cash takes up employment as a salesman travelling from door to door in order to be able to support his ever increasing family. After hearing some music while walking outside a recording studio, he decides to set up a band playing Gospel music. The auditions for Sam Phillips who was the owner of Sun Records are the stuff of legend and these are very aptly described in the film. Cash's band eventually wins the contract with Sun Records and they begin touring on the basis of their famous song, ' Folsom Prison Blues' .

Here one may perhaps dispute the historical accuracy of the film since there isn't any really proof that the song ' Folsom Prison Blues' was amongst the first Cash took on tour. The film also focuses extensively on Cash's

relationship with June Carter who eventually divorces her husband to be with Cash although the relationship turns sour and Cash turns to drugs and alcohol to keep up himself. This descent into the maelstrom is very well documented in the film as it shows how a man can end up in the dregs of society even though he has everything. I was especially impressed by Joaquin Phoenix's acting here since he brings about the torments and tribulations which the singer went through accordingly. The film also includes several elements which are characteristic of the times and take you back to the 1950's in more ways than one. The costumes are particularly intriguing and have that authentic feel to it with several aspects brought out in full blasted view.

The ' Ring of Fire' episode is also very well documented in the film especially the part when June disposes of Cash's drugs and alcohol in one fell swoop. Ebert (2005) disputes this scene for historical accuracy but one has to allow some sort of poetic license in this movie especially since it creates a sense of excitement about the issues faced by the singer. This is a crucial part of the film and it demonstrates the importance of embarking on a career in sound mind. The relationship with Cash's wife Vivian is also treated quite in detail and ends up as being a very important part of proceedings.

However the film may be criticised since it completely blots out the last two decades of Cash's life and seems to focus too much on the ' Folsom Prison Blues' episode. Still this could arguably be described as the point where Cash realised how lucky he was in life to have been able to change before it was too late and save himself from total ruin and destruction.

The relationship with Cash's father is also an important part of the film as the

latter was always denigrating his son about his efforts and successes, perhaps a prompt to move him to drugs and alcohol accordingly. The detoxification period which Cash experiences is also an important part of the film and shows that he tried to change himself very hard and was at heart, not a bad person at all. Carino (2005) focuses extensively on this period in Cash's life as he also shows that this was a crucially important part of his career and that it helped save him from destruction and obliteration. The film also focuses on the importance of the Folsom Prison Concert in Cash's career. It can be seen as a life enhancing statement since it demonstrated that Cash had a new audience in terms of the prisoners whom he felt comfortable with as they were sort of blood brothers. There are touching moments in the film, especially when he receives the occasional fan mail from the prisoners who idealize him. Critics such as Harsin (2007) have denigrated these episodes for focusing too much on Hollywood style plots which are intended to tug at heart strings and provide emotions much to the expense of the historical context.

The film also tends to exaggerate certain issues especially within the context of the Folsom Prison Blues concert. Roger Ebert (2005) focuses on these historical inaccuracies which seem to permeate the film since these are essentially done to increase the drama and sense of meaning in the whole film. The director does not seem to want to concentrate unduly on being historically accurate but rather to demonstrate the importance of certain episodes in Johnny cash's life with regard to his musical career. Sarris (2007) is on the contrary very much enthused by the historical accuracy of the film but his comments mostly focus on the accuracy of the costumes and other

paraphernalia which make up the set. Streissguth (2004) gives what may seem to be excessive importance to the story of the concert which is backed up by the film accordingly.

Country music seems to take on a new lease of life with 'Walk the Line'. Even its ubiquitous title tends to create a certain amount of passion and this means that the film is all about walking your own tightrope or 'line' as it has been described. Johnny Cash was certainly faced with demons and challenges from very early on in his life but he managed to conquer them with alacrity and sheer determination. The film almost seems to imply that the time in prison was actually important for Cash's musical development. In fact Corliss (2005) describes Cash as a Phoenix rising out of the Ring of Fire', which is a not so subtle allusion of Cash's battle with drinks and drugs and how he eventually conquered all this. Perhaps this is also a slight weak point in the film since it tends to emphasise that most rock stars and singers eventually turned to drugs and drink to satisfy ever increasing bouts of loneliness and unhappiness.

The film obviously invites some comparisons with other great musical figures. The parallel of Elvis Presley perhaps runs like a constant leitmotif yet Cash was far more hardscrabble and made of tougher material than the King of Rock'. Personally I felt that some more importance should have been given to the final two decades of cash's life since these were also important for the influence he had on several up and coming country music singers. However the acting of the main characters especially Phoenix and Rheese Witherspoone is totally mind boggling and they recreate the characters of Cash and June with uncanny alacrity and almost stunning accuracy. The film

is probably one of the finest portrayals of a country music star around and certainly deserves repeated viewings. It does contain some strong parts which are not for the faint hearted but on the whole it is quite successful at continuing to increase the legend that was Johnny Cash. Some historical inaccuracies are certainly present but on the whole it is a good film and continues to add to our understanding of the singer's life.

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