

Spring 2014

# American IV: The Man Comes Around as a Musical Memoir

Amy Bonsal

La Salle University, [Bonsala1@student.lasalle.edu](mailto:Bonsala1@student.lasalle.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/undergraduateresearch>

 Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), [Modern Literature Commons](#), and the [Music Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Bonsal, Amy, "American IV: The Man Comes Around as a Musical Memoir" (2014). *Undergraduate Research*. 10.  
<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/undergraduateresearch/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the La Salle Scholar at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Research by an authorized administrator of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [careyc@lasalle.edu](mailto:careyc@lasalle.edu).

Amy Bonsal

*American IV: The Man Comes Around* as a Musical Memoir

Musicians are marked, measured and branded by the material they produce, and often how it pertains to their own life. Particularly, in the case of country and rock & roll icon, Johnny Cash, all eyes locked in on his *American* recordings. These albums were recorded as his health steadily declined, signifying his musical end, if not physical death, was looming. Therefore, when his album *American IV: The Man Comes Around* was released in 2002, it was clear Cash was reflecting back on his career. Upon analysis of this album, it is evident that Cash had wanted to create a lasting impression with his music. What he had recorded proved to be extremely telling as Cash died months after the album's release. The album consists of three Cash originals from different points in his career, and twelve covers of songs that span the decades and various genres. It is through this track listing that Cash created a clear reflection of his life, a musical memoir of his past.

However, questions have circulated regarding the authenticity of the album, and Cash's true intention. Critics see his final album as a compilation of weak covers hoping to help him regain popularity. For example, writer Michael Streissguth felt, "Cash had no business recording these light rock ballads, as out of step with his vocal and interpretive abilities, not to mention his image, as they were" (276). The covers did not resonate with certain fans as they saw the covers as insincere compositions. On the contrary, the album provides sincere snapshots of regret, sadness and guilt over his past. It is through these lyrical and musical elements that the album strips all prior notions of Cash's identity, and becomes a musical memoir that represents the true Johnny Cash.

Memoirs are complex forms of writing as they do not take a concrete shape or form. They also allow for readers to completely divulge their situation. Their value of truth is significant as authors have freedom to fully express themselves. However, generally memoirs are not thought to be works of music. Albums recorded by popular artists are often thought to reflect popular culture, relationships or empty words written by producers. *American IV* is a prime candidate for criticism regarding comparison to a memoir. First, in Cash's failing health, his producer Rick Rubin had compiled a great deal of the song choices. Rubin and Cash had worked together to create the track listing, but ultimately Rubin made a lot of the choices (Hilburn 591). Also, twelve of the fifteen songs on the album are covers. Therefore, the album is fueled by other musicians' words rather than Cash's. One could argue Cash was hoping to look for commercial success by riding on the tails of other successful hits from prominent musicians of the early 2000s. However, Cash's album is beyond the typical recording of an artist looking to obtain a hit on the charts. Cash's final reflection in essence is a memoir. He uses the tracks to fully express his emotions and reflections on his life. Rubin and Cash specifically chose songs that were relevant to his life and the themes he had hoped to portray. The words embedded within the songs ring true for Cash and connect directly to moments in his life, as well as major themes that prove to be relevant. The album encompasses all of the qualifications to be a memoir, but simply takes a different form. The medium Cash uses does not in any way detract from the content, and only adds to the significance of it serving as a memoir. The album aims to fulfill the purpose of a memoir as Cash displays the ability to present an honest and open piece of art through an album.

### **Methods**

The methods that I will be consulting in order to conduct this analysis will delve beyond the album itself. There will be a concrete focus on Cash's most recent biography, *Johnny Cash:*

*The Life* (2013) by acclaimed journalist Robert Hilburn, as well as on Cash's 1997 autobiography. These two sources will be relevant in analyzing the lyrical and musical content of the tracks of *American IV*, as many elements of the songs can be considered autobiographical. Also, there is often contradiction between outside sources reporting Cash's life and his own personal testimony of events. I will consult other biographies and similar content in analyzing Cash's personal life. Through analyzing these biographical sources it has become clear that *American IV* is often more accurate than the books. Cash uses the album as medium for a completely truthful explanation of events. The songs prove to be unexpurgated, as certain feelings of guilt and regret are fully explored rather than glossed over or ignored. I will also use academic sources regarding memoirs in analyzing the album in terms of both an autobiography and a memoir. Also throughout my assessment, various books, journals, and articles regarding Cash's career, music genres, amphetamine addiction, and other important aspects of Cash's life will be consulted. Overall, I aim to provide an in-depth analysis of Cash's final album and how it can be argued to be a new version of a musical memoir.

Cash's life was filled with contradictions. He was a man devoted to his faith, and the idea of family yet he constantly failed to stay within his own guidelines. He battled his inner demons from an early age. The biographical events in his life help to outline the major themes that appeared in both his personal life and his music. In order to properly analyze *American IV*, a proper understanding of the significance of the album must be outlined. Also, it is necessary to divulge the common perception of a memoir, and how Cash's album fits into this idea. A clear breakdown of the tracks on the album with a concentration on events in Cash's life will work to create a clear vision of the album as a memoir. Overall, upon close analysis of the album and its significance, it will be clear that this album served as Cash's final message.

## Album Significance

Country mogul Johnny Cash's career changed dramatically throughout the years. He began as a simple storyteller, emerged as a potential activist, toyed with the folk genre, and finally crossed into rock in his final years. He went beyond his humble days of being called J.R. in Dyess, Arkansas and was catapulted into the country music world. The perceptions of Cash depend on the decade and can vary greatly. In the late '60s Cash's name was extremely relevant, as he was constantly being presented in pop culture. "Between 1968 and 1970, he was mentioned over 276 times with more than a dozen articles specifically about him, including full-length features in both *The New York Times* and *The New York Times Magazine* (Silverman, "A 'Dove with Claws'" 94). Cash was extremely famous and his fans from across the globe considered themselves fans of various genres. In this same time period Cash created a song and a persona that would prove to be long lasting. He is often most remembered as the "Man in Black." The song of the same name was released in 1971 and Cash adopted this persona. He "dressed to mourn the poor, the beaten down, the hungry, the prisoners, the sick, the lonely, the old, the reckless drug users, and Vietnam war dead" (Ellison 27). He was viewed as an activist, a voice for the underdog and a speaker for the misrepresented. In this same time period Cash had made comments regarding the Vietnam War and had played at the White House. However, when considering these comments and seemingly political statements and songs, Cash's viewpoint was still unknown. "Leigh Edwards calls this political ambiguity a contradictory element meant to keep audiences from characterizing the performer" (Silverman, *Nine Choices* 131). Clearly Cash was unsure about this persona, as he was used to being solely about the music. He typically was driven to produce music that spoke to his soul. Cash sang about his personal life, but only subtly and through specific song choices. "Walk the Line" was one of his most personal songs, as it

previewed him and June Carter's relationship. Therefore, his hesitance to open up through his music makes *American IV* have weighted significance. The fifteen tracks bare a great deal of emotion and allow him to fully unearth his feelings. His final album creates connections surrounding his drug use and infidelity, topics he often sheltered. The personal touches throughout the album are what make it so compelling. His willingness to share is genuine and appears to fans that he aims to be truthful in his portrayal. This interestingly contrasts this prior notion of a political rebel. Cash was uncomfortable with this persona, and unsure himself how he felt about these issues. Therefore, his musicality and persona appears more genuine in his final album as he is able to fully divulge his feelings and discuss topics that were once taboo.

Johnny Cash's career was in a lull before he teamed up with rock music producer Rick Rubin. He had continued to struggle with drugs and it was clear that his body was beginning to fight back after so many years of torment. As Hilburn states, "By the spring of 1987, the years of abusing his body had left him worn down. He was fifty-five going on seventy-five, and for the rest of his life he'd have to battle another unforgiving enemy: his declining health and the accompanying pain" (517). This is a focal point in Cash's career as he was beginning to face the reality that his body was rebelling against him. Arguably, it became apparent, from this year forward, that his time was limited. Any music that Cash produced could very well be his last as his health failed. Each track laid down needed to have more weight and importance, and had to possess more thought.

In May 1993, the unlikely pair of Johnny Cash and Rick Rubin met to begin working on Cash's newest album. Rubin capitalized on working with budding rock artists, such as the Beastie Boys, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Aerosmith and more (Brown ix). His focus on rap, metal, and new age rock made his transition to working with country crooner Johnny Cash surprising.

Their genre differences created a group of skeptics, curious to how the pair would work together. However, Rubin was patient with Cash, making a point to create something that was purely Johnny. Their first meeting simply began with Rubin saying, “I’d love to hear some of your favorite songs” (Hilburn 540). It was through this relationship that the *American* recordings began. The reason these albums were so successful can be attributed to the partnership between Cash and his producer. Rubin’s focus from the beginning was to create music that felt true to Cash (Brown 106). Their collaboration of song choices had a heavy focus on the lyrical content, allowing Cash to connect with all of the songs chosen. With Rubin, Cash went far beyond the genre of country music, or even folk. Rubin forced Cash to consider classic rock, punk and modern alternative music. The four albums (and part of a fifth) created by Cash were all a mixture of covers and originals. Rubin often compiled a mix CD for Cash that would feature songs he believed would be fitting for him. He often focused on the lyrics, telling Cash to look beyond the musicality of the songs, as that could always be adjusted (Hilburn 591). This variety in song choices further created “Cash’s odd demographics—loved by those outside of his accepted genre and not played by the genre’s gatekeepers” (Silverman, “A ‘Dove with Claws’” 103). Cash was aware that he did not quite fit into the mold of a genre. His entire career he had shifted classifications and country music opinion leaders struggled to define if and where to play Cash. His work with Rubin furthered this complication, but supported the idea that Cash only played music that appealed to him. This made his work with Rubin that much more compelling.

As mentioned, Cash knew these would be his last recordings and truly wanted to make them memorable. Cash stated to Hilburn, “If these were going to be my last recordings, I wanted them to tell a little bit of a road map, so to speak, about who I was as a musician and as a man. I’ve been really conscious about handing something down” (581). Clearly, these albums were

immensely important to Cash. He knew there were moments in his life he had still hoped to reflect upon, and there were emotions he had not yet explored. Therefore, these *American* recordings proved to be his journal in his final years. It was through these albums, specifically *The Man Comes Around*, that Cash recorded his final thoughts. In these final years Cash was more reflective. He had thoughts that were vying to get out, ideas he had wished to express. Cash had told author Robert Hilburn in a later interview “about personal things, especially some regrets—not being a better father to his daughters, not being a better husband to June in the early days, not being a better Christian, and not being a more dedicated musician” (Hilburn 600). These are some of the major topics covered in *American IV*. Essentially, these topics do not paint Cash to be an ideal man, but they were the previously guarded truths he aimed to share with his friends, family, and fans. It is important to note that this album was liberating for Cash.

When Cash released the album in 2002, there were high expectations as he had had previous success with Rubin. However, criticism regarding the album and lingering skeptics about Cash and Rubin’s relationship quickly emerged. The other side of the duet for “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry,” Nick Cave, had an interesting outlook regarding Rubin and Cash’s final work. “I’ve heard criticisms from certain people that Rick was kind of bleeding him dry by getting him back into the studio,” says Nick Cave. “But I’ve gotta say, it was the other way around. He was energising this man and giving him something that he hadn’t had for a while” (Thomson 221). *American IV* continues the theme of Cash as a contradictory man but the album proves to be the purest sentiment of all. Cash represented the true American man: flawed, remorseful, and contradictory. However, some critics saw Cash’s final album’s unclear genre as a negative point claiming, “The levels of ambiguity are a fitting sendoff for a performer who had always projected indeterminateness. And the marketing of such work suggested Cash’s realness,

even as it acknowledged his long career” (Silverman, *Nine Choices* 18). According to Silverman, Cash never had a clear identity, and his final album was simply Rubin’s *attempt* at reaching authenticity. He describes the album as ambiguous, lacking consistency.

Although critics were quick to claim the album had a lack of focus, the album’s multiple genres were actually quite fitting. The album’s varied track listing is actually an accurate depiction of Cash’s career. Throughout his career he was considered to fit within the rock, folk, and country genre. Therefore, the album’s variety of genres is an accurate reflection of his career. *New York Times* editor Dana Jennings explains, “Johnny Cash singing ‘I Walk the Line’ [...] still gives us more insight in three minutes, tells us more about what matters most in our lives, than we get in an entire twenty-four-hour news cycle” (218). He had the ability to appeal and speak to such a wide variety of audiences, and this was clear on *American IV*. Also, the set of clear themes, mainly centering on regret and death are an accurate portrayal of Cash. He was aware he was in the final years of his life, therefore he reflected upon these elements that were timely. Cash was able to use this album as a vehicle before dying. He could explore all of his inhibitions and delve into topics he had once avoided.

The album accurately portrays Cash’s career and current state upon recording. Also, although Silverman views Cash’s level of indeterminateness as a negative aspect, this is not accurate. His inconsistency is what tailored his appeal and created his exciting persona. Cash was a man who consistently made mistakes then sought redemption, and was unsure about his feelings on the majority of hot political topics. He was unapologetic in his search for truth and his ever-changing identity. This is what made him relatable and real, up until his last breath. These words sung on *American IV* became his final memoir, as he reflected back on the legacy

he had left. He took bold risks in his exploration of his often negative qualities but created a sense of truth in his final musical declarations.

### **The Album as a Memoir**

A memoir is a particularly difficult genre to specifically and concretely define. Authors are constantly rewriting and inventing different perceptions of this deeply intimate type of writing. In terms of etymology, the word memoir reflects the French word for memory (Couser 19). Generally, all the varying definitions of memoir can agree upon the fact that memoirs are deeply rooted in the personal experience. In the debate about what exactly denotes a memoir, it often receives negative criticism: “Memoir has been made to seem less authentic than autobiography, and less about self-presence than exteriority. It is often not written by ‘real,’ professional writers and it does not need to have literary merit” (Rak 499). However, although the memoir may not have high prestige or regard, it often has much more raw emotion. It is within this loose genre that authors can truly explore the depths of their emotions and the deeper meaning within their memories.

Specifically, a memoir can be summed up as “A form of writing that keeps less, gives more” (Miller 545). All the varying definitions and classifications of memoir emphasize the fact that a proper memoir divulges all that is necessary. Cash achieves this goal, as the tracks on the album all work to create a very clear memoir. The album conceptually fits in with his career and was an appropriate send off. Thomson accurately places the album in perspective, writing, “The *American* albums are very much part of a story, and *The Man Comes Around* makes perfect, deeply satisfying sense within that wider narrative. A knowledge and understanding of Cash’s trials and travails, his journey, his myth, would help initially to orientate” (220). The tracks culminate to create a cohesive memoir that sums up the definitive Johnny Cash. The album was

meticulously made and its cohesive manner reflects that. Cash and record producer Rick Rubin teamed up to pick the songs that would help Cash complete the telling of his story. He had published autobiographies before, but this album was something different, beyond the realm of a book. As noted, memoirs often go beyond books and delve into “diaries, confessions, letters or journals” (Rak 484). Cash’s album borrows more from this ideal, as it is a culmination of personal experiences, themes and emotions regarding his past. Typically, a memoir is perceived to be a snippet in time or a specific memory. Often this small scope is what separates an autobiography from a memoir (Couser 23). However, Cash defies this expectation as the album focuses less on a specific period in his life and more on themes that defined his entire life: guilt, regret, and sadness. Embedded within the lyrics of the songs one can make biographical connections to Cash’s life. He takes the idea of a memoir, something deeply personal, and shapes it into something uniquely his. As argued among scholars, memoirs depend less on truth and more on a compelling story. Authors of memoirs are often encouraged to find a middle ground between the facts and the interesting story at hand (Couser 80). *American IV* is more of a memoir in the abstract. The themes of a memoir are present, as Cash looks back on his life and the moments he regrets. However, with no direct allusion to dates, times, people or events he cannot be faulted for a lack of honesty. His songs of emotion dig into the darkest times of his life. His drug addiction is alluded to, his love life, and his criminal offenses. However, these biographical glimpses are tucked away into the lyrics of these songs, and the musicality Cash brings to the tracks.

Another aspect of typical memoirs that Cash defies is the idea of originality. Memoirs are often thought to be reflections of “life writing.” The genre derives its uniqueness from the fact that, “Unlike the novel, in literate cultures memoir is a version of something many people

produce as part of their daily lives” (Couser 26). Memoirs are contrived from the idea that the author channels an event and then expresses it in his or her own personal way. It is uniquely them, and shows their authenticity, as the authors either lived the situation, or experienced it through a first-hand account. However, Cash’s album is different as twelve of the fifteen songs on the album are covers. In his attempts to reflect back on his life, he reaches out to others. Although this may be perceived as not authentic, or incredibly distant in a memoir, it is the opposite. Cash and Rubin searched through songs from a variety of generations, looking for the ones that spoke directly to Cash. It is in these meaningful lyrics and the often revamped music that Cash redefines these songs. He changes the tone or the pace of the song, contriving a completely new meaning. He has the ability to perceive what others have written and make it relate back to his own story. Cash had handpicked fifteen songs that provoked emotions from his entire life. They span the decades and speak to specific audiences. The songs piece together the puzzle of his final years of life. The album collectively is a memoir that is personal to Cash and looks back on his life, and just what he had done and whom he had hurt.

It is through these specific tracks that Cash reflects upon certain aspects of his life. He uses the album as an outlet to cleverly divulge his feelings of regret, as well as his feelings about his impending death. Each track provides a glimpse into his thought process as his health declined and he had to choose which songs would define his final music production. Cash used this album to speak to both his fans and his family, to informally record his final reflections in this musical memoir. A track by track analysis of the album *American IV: The Man Comes Around* will help uncover the meaning beyond the song choices, and the themes that they present.

### **Breakdown of Tracks**

Cash's health was steadily failing in 2002, and it was clear to both him and Rubin that this process was becoming increasingly taxing. With often a month in between cutting the tracks, it was clear that Cash had to pour his soul into this final album (Hilburn). The producers used what they were able from Cash's vocal track and then it "was about preserving the moment of original inspiration, then going to often painstaking lengths to construct an appropriately authentic structure around it" (Thomson 218). As it loomed to be his final work, he needed to make sure that what he was producing was significant. This album was his space to reflect back upon his life in its entirety, varying from his devotion to God to his bitter regrets toward those he had harmed. Cash had sometimes been open in the past about his drug use and the mistakes he had made, but this album was different. The album was fully uninhibited space for Cash as he delved into topics he rarely touched upon. The themes that are presented in the album are reminiscences, suffering, despair and regret, as well as guilt and empathy. Finally, *American IV* allowed him to further discover his religion and face his looming death. References to specific moments in Cash's life can be woven into these themes to create a clear sense of the album's significance.

I will not be analyzing the songs in the order of their original listing, but rather by the theme in which they fit best. To begin, I will look at the theme of reminiscences, as three songs fit into this dynamic. This theme is significant to begin the analysis because it displays how Cash aimed to create a memoir with this CD. In the literal sense, these songs reflect back on certain moments and relationships he had formed in his life. The songs create a clear theme that Cash hoped to reflect, and the theme of reminiscences will blend into the next theme of suffering, despair, and regret. When looking back on memories, Cash cannot avoid those he had hurt, and the times he had felt immense pain. These tracks all signify the darker times in his life, but they

are often enhanced by the hopeful outlook that was embedded within Cash. It is through these songs that he is able to work through his complex feelings.

The theme of suffering despair and regret then leads into the natural progression of guilt and empathy, as they were major components in his life. His constant absence from being on tour and deep addictions caused Cash to constantly battle feelings of guilt toward his love ones. He also realized the damage he was imposing on his own body and his personal welfare. Therefore, as he often reeled in guilt, he developed a deep sense of empathy throughout his life. Cash constantly aimed to understand others and offered to save individuals from their personal perils. This interesting personality paradox was persistent in Cash for the duration of his lifetime. There were numerous encounters in Cash's life where he specifically devoted time to understanding and rehabilitating individuals who had lost their way. For example, he paroled and gave a job on his tour to an inmate he had met at a prison. Cash's unwavering compassion created a paradox as he was always willing to help those in need of redemption, yet he could not save himself. He was constantly at odds with his inner morality and his outward tendency to rebel. Overall, his sense of guilt and empathy added to Cash's inconsistent yet captivating persona.

Naturally, the final aspect to consider is his final days, where he reflected most on death and religion. The songs in this section are both the most upsetting as well as the most uplifting. Cash uses these songs as an outlet to explore his personal battles and accept the ideas of departing the physical world. He had always been comfortable in his religion and insisted it be a major part of his musical career, which is extremely present in his final album. Overall, through these clear themes we find a roadmap of Cash's final years on earth as he battled his inner inhibitions and deepest fears. It is through this reflection upon death and religion that Cash really enriches his musical memoir. These songs help document his confrontation with death, and the

feelings that he was faced with as a result. His raw reflections comprise the elements of an open and truthful memoir. The heartbreaking realization that death is looming, is the perfect content for his musical journal. Arguably, it is his reflection on death and religion that are the crux of his memoir, the themes that refined his authenticity and connection with listeners.

### *Reminiscences*

There are three songs on *American IV* that strongly guide the idea that this album was strictly meant to be a memoir: the tracks, “In My Life,” “Give My Love to Rose” and “Tear Stained Letter.” All three of these reflect back on certain moments of Cash’s life that are important. Specific milestones, tragedies, and memories in Cash’s life will be used as leverage in the argument that *American IV* is a memoir. These songs specifically speak to Cash’s family members and those who were pivotal throughout his life.

The first song within this theme is “In My Life,” which was recorded by The Beatles in 1965 and is all encompassing as it speaks to a wide range of people encountered in life. The song is slowed down considerably by Cash as he opens with lyrics that signify this is a song of remembrance: “There are places I remember / All my life though some have changed / Some forever not for better.” Lines like these create the idea that the singer is reflecting back on their life, remembering the people and places that had created an impact. Then, the song focuses on one person as Cash proceeds to sing, “But of all these friends and lovers / There is no one compares with you.” From this lyric forward the song shifts to focusing on how the singer cherishes all their memories, but everything must be considered within the context that there was one person at the center of their life.

When looking through the moments of Cash’s life, there is one pivotal time that stands out above the rest: the death of his brother Jack. A few months after his twelfth birthday, on May

13, 1944, something seemed off to Cash. Jack, 15, had felt uneasy about going off to work, but compelled by his work ethic he continued on. Ultimately, this feeling persisted within the family throughout the day, and tragedy struck as a table saw fatally tore open Jack (Hilburn 14-5). Upon his death a few days after the incident, Cash knew he would never be the same again. There is no one who could compare to his older brother. This is clear as he states in his autobiography, “After Jack’s death I felt like I’d died, too. I just didn’t feel alive. I was terribly lonely without him. I had no other friend” (28). Specifically, as the lyric states, there is no other friend that could compare to Jack. His first and only friend in childhood had been taken from him, and Cash was forced to forge forward in the world with a gaping hole in his heart. His memories of Jack are incomparable, and he could not compare any times with other friends when looking back on his life. The song reflects the pain Cash felt as a young boy that remained with him until his dying days. When Cash was to reflect back on his life, in a final CD, there was no way that he could not contrive a special message to Jack, from J.R.

His daughter, Roseanne, recounted how she feels the death affected her father: “Dad was wounded so profoundly by Jack’s death, and by his father’s reaction—the blame and recrimination and bitterness,” she says. ‘If someone survives that kind of damage, either great evil or great art can come out of it. And my dad had the seed of great art in him” (Hilburn 17). Cash’s notably cold and distant father had blamed him for Jack’s death, insisting he should have prevented him from going to work that day (Hilburn 17). Cash was weighed down by both the loss of his hero and mentor, but also by the bitter neglect of his father. He has also been very open about the impact of the loss of his brother and aimed to share his devotion to his late brother and friend. As he stated, “Losing Jack was terrible. It was awful at the time and it’s still a big, cold, sad place in my heart and soul” (Cash 27). He has also stated that Jack presided over

him even in his times of wrongdoing, and it is this knowledge that has resurrected him from times of evil (Hilburn 16). Overall, the death of his brother Jack was something immeasurable to Cash and was always at the forefront of his mind.

Another song pointed toward a loved one is, “Give My Love to Rose” as it could speak specifically to his son John Carter. Although John Carter was not alive when Cash first recorded the song, he could have come to mind when he recorded the song again in 2002. The song seemed to hold a new meaning in light of his son’s life. Cash had a particularly special relationship with his only son as he had been born at a time when he was finally level-headed. Cash understood the complexity of his addiction and that he had often neglected his four daughters in his bouts of instability (Cash 265). He described their relationship as something unique and immensely important to him. When speaking of John Carter, Cash stated, “I was there physically, and most of the time emotionally, while he grew up, and he and I were playmates in those magic years between toddlerhood and puberty when a boy and his father can really have fun. In some ways we grew up together. He might have taught me more than I taught him” (Cash 265). The birth of John Carter served as a rebirth for Cash, as he was able to share a child with his eternal soul mate, June Carter. Cash was forty when John was born in 1970, and although he was not clean for his son’s entire life, he was certainly more composed than he was when raising his daughters. Therefore, when considering his legacy in the early 2000s it was clear that John Carter was a focal point.

The song “Give My Love to Rose” is a Cash original he had written in 1957 but did not record until the late ’60s. The song was unique to Cash, as he wrote it in a time when he was hoping to capture his earliest success in song writing. Hilburn recounts Cash’s inspiration for the tune, as he spoke with a man backstage. “The man had just been released from prison and was

looking forward to going home to Shreveport to see his wife. But he didn't know how or when he could get there because he was broke and jobless, He knew that Cash was a regular on the Louisiana Hayride and asked him to say hello to his wife if he got to Shreveport first" (Hilburn 130). Clearly then, this song was homage to a man who had lost his way, but had clear intentions of coming back home to his loved ones. Cash could relate to this idea as he himself had lost his way before. In the midst of his drug-induced states, he still had honorable intentions. Just like the prisoner, Cash had hoped to return to his loved ones. The prisoner had physically done wrong and had been displaced as a result. Cash had created emotional scars in his life and was searching for ways to make amends. The song takes a dark turn as Cash wrote that the man was dying by the railroad tracks, but the message is still clear. The deepened idea of redemption lay within Cash and this was rooted in his religion (Hilburn 131). Cash was constantly meeting and connecting with individuals that were in need of redemption. He connected with these people and was empathic in their suffering. His religion was a focal point in this; as a Christian he saw the importance in forgiveness. Cash enjoyed placing himself in the midst of people, specifically where people needed him most. When speaking of religion, Cash stated, "I'm trying very hard to be a practicing Christian. If you take the words of Jesus literally and apply them to our everyday life, you discover that the greatest fulfillment you'll ever find really does lie in giving. And that's why I do things like prison concerts" (Tunnell and Hamm 58). Therefore, through the lens of his Christianity and own battles with redemption, this song reflects back on his personal life.

When analyzing these biographical aspects, it is clear that although Cash may not have thought so in '57, this song became deeply personal. In the years that Cash battled drug abuse, he struggled to be a good father. There were many times when he just barely escaped death, and often appeared to be the 'bad guy' to his children. He had done wrong, but he ultimately sought

redemption. Therefore, in his final years, one can see how Cash may have connected with this song in a special way. He wanted his children to see beyond his flaws, and accept him for his true intentions to be a solid foundation for their family. Specifically, in the face of death, he hoped to entrust the same words of wisdom to John Carter as were found in “Give My Love to Rose.” As the lyrics state, “Tell my boy his daddy’s so proud of him / And don’t forget to give my love to Rose.” This lyric alone is drenched in meaning as it at once speaks to John, June and his daughters. The song’s Rose was even a nod to his daughter Roseanne (Hilburn 131).

Therefore, Cash was first and foremost speaking to John, hoping that he would carry out the Carter-Cash legacy and protect the females in the family. Cash was also speaking to June, as she of course, after years of an unstable relationship, was his ultimate life partner. With the song title, and implications upon John Carter, Cash still hoped that his fond memories of his children and their cherished family time would live on in the hearts of his family.

“Give My Love to Rose” is a testament to the important people in Cash’s life in recent years. However, “Tear Stained Letter” speaks to Cash’s ex-wife Vivian and their relationship. The catchy song chronicles heartbreak, and a somewhat spiteful attempt to get a girl back. The speaker plans on writing a letter so full of emotion that it will make the girl feel so upset she ever broke his heart that she will be sure to come back. He plans to fill it with emotionally powerful content as the lyrics suggest, “Cause it’s gonna be full of stuff / That’s only known to you and me.” Also, he is confident, almost cocky, in his ability to make the girl severely regret her decision: “It’ll be about the saddest thing / Your mailman ever did bring around.” He is particularly confident this will bring her back as the lyrics indicate the girl has one last chance to consider if she wants to get back together. The song concludes with Cash explaining this letter is genuine, and the intentions are to woo the girl back, as shown in the lyrics in the final verse, “But

a hunk of love included, / meant to take you a little higher. / And to settle on your sweet, sweet mind, at night when you retire.”

The song was originally recorded in 1972 for the album *A Thing Called Love*. The song echoes back to Cash’s Air Force days as writing letters was the only form of communication. When he served in Lansburg Germany, he had just begun his exciting relationship with his first wife Vivian Liberto. The two had met shortly before Cash was to report overseas, so their relationship developed through writing letters (Hilburn 36). Upon entering Germany, Cash was dedicated to keeping in contact with Vivian, and the news of fellow soldiers receiving “Dear John,” or breakup letters, terrified him. “For months, John privately feared bad news whenever he picked up his mail. Constantly trying to reassure himself of her love, he wrote to Vivian every day—sometimes two or three times a day—and he complained when she was even a day late writing back” (Hilburn 43). Therefore, this deep-rooted fear of being rejected while being away from home could have been an early inspiration for the song “Tear Stained Letter.” Cash could have had the song planned out as a snarky quip if Vivian had found someone else while he was away.

Cash admitted in his autobiography that this early period of their relationship was very important to him. He stated,

We wrote to each other almost every day, and as time went by more and more passion and intimacy went onto the paper—every word of mine written in green ink, a color reserved just for her. Vivian still has those letters in a trunk in her house, all but twenty-four of them; last Christmas she gave six to each of our four girls. That scared me at first, but I guess it’s fitting. (Cash 144)

Cash is very open and honest about his past relationship, hoping to harbor no resentment toward his ex-wife. He admitted he was not the ideal husband and that he had often put her in situations where she had to raise their children completely alone (Cash 145). The song “Tear Stained Letter” may serve as a nod to Vivian and their previous relationship. The track may be a cheeky stab at a woman who broke up with a man when he was overseas, but it could also be a thank you to Vivian. She never confirmed his fears of being left while he was away, and she had never deserted his daughters when he had become absorbed in music and drugs. Their love was something that could not endure, but Cash still reminisced about their early days as a couple and immensely appreciated Vivian until the end.

The song could even have served as an apology that their relationship had failed and that he was a transient father. The song provides a more coy and loving viewpoint than what is used in the autobiography. The freedom of addressing sensitive topics through songs could have played a major role in this section. Cash was able to fully divulge themes that were previously hidden. Overall, these three songs mark important themes and pay homage to significant people in Cash’s life. Specifically, family is at the center of all of these songs. He had hoped to be a dutiful father, brother, and son, and ultimately he often failed. However, when looking back on his life, he realized the people he held closest to him had really always been the ones to stand by him unconditionally. His brother would continually watch over him from beyond the grave, his son relentlessly still saw his father as a hero, and his ex-wife Vivian was a constant presence in his daughters’ lives. However, it is during these times that he was led astray that Cash experienced suffering, despair, and regret.

*Suffering, Despair, and Regret*

When reminiscing back on his life, Cash was bound to face the difficult times that were significant. Cash admitted that there were many times in his life when he blatantly made mistakes. He had chosen drugs over family, committed infidelity, and hurt those who were close to him. The songs “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry,” “Bridge over Troubled Water,” and “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” all point toward feelings of sadness. In his final years he had a great deal of time to look back on his life and reflect upon his actions. These songs testify to these negative feelings and serve as a form of apology for all that he had done wrong.

Cash had lost a lot of people he was close to in his lifetime. As mentioned, he had lost his brother at a young age, so he knew very well the pain that loss brings. He had also lost his band member Luther Perkins in 1968. The death of his parents, as well as the majority of June’s family members in the mid 1980s to early 1990s truly weighed down on Cash (Hilburn 507). These types of despair caused Cash to put his life in perspective when he created *American IV*. He was forced to reflect on times of suffering and isolation. Cash was also aware that he had never been an outstanding father. There were many nights when his daughters and son felt clueless to the whereabouts of Cash. He channeled this suffering in a different way: “I’d realize that I’d forgotten to call home and say goodnight to my girls. Of course, sometimes that would feel so bad that I’d have to take another pill or two just to feel okay again” (Cash 143). These deep dark feelings are what propelled his loneliness as he knew he had both betrayed his family, and suffered many losses in his life.

Cash has been noted to be a contradiction in multiple works, as his intentions never quite matched his actions. For example, Cash deeply valued his family, yet it was the “tortured overlapping of healing and self-destruction, grace and pain—and the restless, seeking energy it generates—[that] defines Cash” (Edwards 50). Cash created his pain and suffering when he

chose not to make it home to wish his children goodnight, but he also thrived on the redemption. Cash could be absent and create a rift in his children's hearts but then return as the hero, bearing gifts and generous love to emulate the perfect father he hoped to be. The song "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" is a smart addition to his musical memoir, as it touches upon his suffering, but also points out his contradictions, as many of the low points in his life were self-propelled.

The song was recorded by country star Hank Williams in 1949 and then was later covered by Cash and Nick Cave for *American IV*. Cash mirrors Williams' slow crooning of the four-verse song with lyrics that consistently repeat the title of the song, "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry." He offers a dramatic vocal performance as he drags out and belts the lyrics, "The moon just went behind the clouds to hide its face and cry." The most influential lyrics of the song are, "Did you ever see a robin weep, when leaves begin to die? / Like me, he's lost the will to live / I'm so lonesome I could cry." These lyrics can be connected to his paradoxical relationship of being a father. The robin in the mentioned lyrics cries and has lost the will to live as pieces of its home within the trees have fallen to the ground. Cash experienced this similar pain and loss of will to live when he had abandoned his family many times, succumbing to the plights of being an addict. The song could have been placed on the album to acknowledge these times of hardship and his fear of them returning. Although Cash had finally rectified the majority of his relationships in his final years, he still feared being alone. He feared that if he were to lose any more loved ones, he would enter a phase again as described in the song, where he was full of loneliness.

The song "Bridge over Troubled Water" hits upon similar themes of suffering, despair and guilt. Cash had endured and created a great deal of suffering in his life, but there was one person who was his constant supporter. June Carter had been romantically involved with Cash

before he had even divorced Vivian. She had become his support system from the moment they began a relationship (Hilburn 221-5). Cash had not originally been completely faithful to June, often committing acts of adultery. However, Hilburn notes that the couple's relationship significantly improved as they grew older, as Cash's negative habits faded and his devotion deepened (530). In his later years, he became quick to fully divulge how much he was indebted to her. "June said she knew me—knew the kernel of me, deep inside, beneath the drugs and deceit and despair and anger and selfishness, and knew my loneliness. She said she could help me. She said we were soul mates, she and I, and that she would fight for me with all her might, however she could" (Cash 167). Therefore, it is clear that Cash viewed June as his savior from sadness, redeemer from suffering, and provider of guidance. In this light, Cash clearly had June in mind when recording the song "Bridge over Troubled Water."

The song was originally written and recorded by Simon & Garfunkel for the 1970 album with the same title. Cash creates a somber sound with the song, as he delivers the lyrics with the conviction of a church hymn. Lyrics such as, "When times get rough / and friends just can't be found, / like a bridge over troubled water, / I will lay me down" seem to speak to June. The song focuses on supporting a devoted friend. The speaker is willing to do whatever it takes to be by the side of his confidant. Cash constantly acknowledged June for always being his solid foundation, and for picking him up when he felt he could not go on any further. However, this song gave Cash the chance to explain his newfound devotion to June. Admittedly, in his later years he had cut out infidelity and found deep appreciation within June. This song aims to provide a hymn of gratitude to his wife. Like the ending lyrics, "I will ease your mind," Cash hoped to steer June to clarity that he had good intentions. Cash had hoped to set this song aside to thank June for her patience and persistence in seeing him through times of despair.

Similarly, the song “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” is a dedication to June and his unending love for her. Cash had met Carter before, but it was on the first night of their 1962 tour together that he began to truly fall for her. “Johnny was especially interested when June said her father loved to read about history and religion. Eventually that first night Cash leaned over and tried to kiss Carter, but she resisted” (Hilburn 222). Their budding musical and then romantic relationship sparked Cash with a newfound passion. Thus, this song is a nod to the early days in their relationship and a testament to their long withstanding love. Again, Cash was hoping to create a message to June that thanked her for her patience and eternal love.

The song “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” was written in 1957 by Ewan MacColl but gained popularity when recorded by Roberta Flack in 1970. The song is lyrically simple, with only four short verses that serve as a romantic homage to a lover. Cash’s slow serenade of the song allows for a clear focus on the words he sings. The song chronicles three events: the first time the singer sets eyes on his love, their first kiss, and the first time they lie together. The final verse rings true when considering the relationship between Cash and June: “And the first time ever I lay with you, / I felt your heart so close to mine. / And I knew our joy would fill the earth and last, / till the end of time, my love.” As Cash and Carter have both mentioned, they truly believe they are each other’s soul mates. Therefore, in light of times of suffering and despair, it is the joy from June that has kept Cash going. Also, this song could reflect upon his regret of infidelity in his early years against June. When reflecting back on his past transgressions, his guilt may explain the somber tone that is persistent throughout the song. Specifically, it is interesting to note that when Cash and Carter began their courtship, Cash was still married to Vivian. Therefore, his somber tone could be a reflection upon their defiance of traditional love. This classic love song lyrically contradicts society’s expectations. A romance

generally is not seen as ideal if one of the partners is still married. This furthers the idea that Cash was a contradictory, yet relatable individual. His true romance did not unfold traditionally, and this song allowed him to openly admit to that. Also, with his health failing, Cash could not ignore the fact that his years with Carter were limited. He knew that it could only be a matter of time before one of them would depart the physical world, and they would be separated until reunited on the other side.

Overall, the three songs, "I'm so Lonesome I Could Cry," "Bridge over Troubled Water," and "First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" are significant in Cash's musical memoir. These songs allowed him to explore the darker times in his life where he was filled with suffering, despair and regret. The themes running throughout highlight the moments when Cash had hurt others, and when he himself had been hurt. June Carter Cash played a significant role in uplifting Cash and he hoped to acknowledge this in *American IV*. In essence, these songs are glimpses into the darker side of Cash, as in his final album he hoped to open previously closed doors.

### *Guilt & Empathy*

Cash had wronged many people in his life. He had turned his back on his family, and fallen into a barbiturate-filled world of illusions. His music often chronicled outlaws and the like who had been led down the wrong path. The songs "Streets of Laredo," "Sam Hall," and "Desperado" all chronicle individuals who have done wrong. Cash's versions portray a sympathetic viewpoint that work toward the theme of empathy. These songs support this idea, but the song "I Hung My Head" encapsulates the theme of both guilt and empathy as the song is filled with autobiographical allusions.

These messages on misguidance and reflection upon mistakes rang true for Cash. He acknowledged in autobiographies and interviews that he felt guilty for a great deal of his actions.

He was constantly at war with himself, battling his intentions against his actions. He was aware he had hurt his loved ones significantly and was always aiming to make amends. Therefore, as a result of his own mistakes, Cash was filled with empathy for others. His compassion and ability to connect with the motives and mindsets of anyone, even criminals, was noteworthy. Cash struggled with these two emotions that often led to his portrayal as a walking contradiction.

Cash's contradictory character went beyond his personal relationships and delved into his behavior. Throughout his career he was portrayed in multiple lights and with varying lenses. "Cash established a heroic working-class masculinity and then explores the uncertainty in that identity" (Stewart 7). Cash had a relatable vibe but also had a hard edge, as he had been arrested multiple times. However, his image was a bit skewed as, "He had to keep admitting that he never did hard time, because his songs and image made people think that he had. His jail time consisted of a total of seven overnight stays between the late 1950s and late 1960s for drug busts and disorderly conduct" (Edwards 20). Cash possessed a contradictory image, as he defied the typical picture of an American man. Idealistically, the American man should be hardworking, loyal and dedicated. However, Cash was deficient in quite a few of these areas.

However, his contradictory persona actually connected him more to the everyday man. His criminal record displayed his misgivings, and his ability to make mistakes. Although his crimes were relatively small, he was still able to relate to those who had served time. He had always connected with the attitude of criminals, and they were often the topic of his songs. For example, his song "Folsom Prison Blues" glorifies crime and a hardened lifestyle (Edwards 20). In contrast, *American IV* features four songs that focus on criminals in a different light. The songs all have a common theme of criminals who need redemption. These are significant for Cash's memoir as he provided an empathetic viewpoint. The lyrics focus on moving forward

from their wrongdoing, and Cash sings with conviction that reflects he understands. Cash had been given countless “second chances” and had been mixed up in criminal activity that he knew was not the righteous path. Therefore, his inclusion of these songs indicates a significant desire to want to address the ability of one to change their ways. Through these songs, Cash adds to his memoir with a testament to the fact that he is finished with his negative habits, but is still empathetic to those who struggle. “Streets of Laredo,” “Sam Hall,” and “Desperado” serve as perfect examples of this theme, that lead into the highly significant track “I Hung My Head.”

“Streets of Laredo,” considered a traditional folk song, has been covered by many artists. The song’s lyrics tell the story of a cowboy who has been shot, and then gives instructions to another cowboy about his funeral. Cash sings the song with conviction and sympathy for the departed. The song features Cash recounting the story of a departed friend. One verse specifically highlights his empathy, “Then go write a letter to my grey-haired mother, / An’ tell her the cowboy that she loved has gone. / But please not one word of the man who had killed me. / “Don’t mention his name and his name will pass on.” These lyrics speak of forgiveness, as the cowboy asks his mother to simply accept his death and seek no prosecution. Although the speaker admits throughout the song, “I’m a young cowboy and I know I’ve done wrong” Cash still lends his sympathy. The inclusion of these lyrics hones in on Cash’s understanding of every person as an individual. Through both his own wrongdoing and observances of criminals, he acknowledges sadness still lies within the passing of those who are deemed toxic to our society.

The song “Sam Hall” presents a similar viewpoint regarding Cash’s empathy. He uses the song to connect back to the wide variety of western and criminal-focused songs of his past. Cash sings the song surprisingly upbeat and spirited in comparison to the album’s primarily somber, sullen sounding tracks. However, Cash offers this song as a nod to his understanding of the

mindset of the criminal. His powerful proclamation in the English folk song's lyric, "My name is Samuel, an' I'll see you all in hell" proves this. Cash understands the different elements of being a criminal, such as the appeal of rebellion as seen in "Sam Hall," as well as the heartbreak as seen in "Streets of Laredo." These two tracks also closely tie in with the song "Desperado," as Cash explores another facet of criminality.

"Desperado" was originally recorded in 1973 for the album with the same name by the rock band the Eagles. Cash delivers the song in the same cautionary and soft tone that is used by the Eagles. The lyrics in this song serve as advice to a criminal who is on the verge of making too many wrong decisions. Cash serves as the perfect narrator for this song because he is one who has been burned by his temptations and mistakes. He may have included the track specifically to warn others, and address his regret for his actions. The final verse is particularly poignant in describing the importance of finding the right path. "Desperado, why don't you come to your senses? / Come down from your fences, open the gate / It may be rainin', but there's a rainbow above you / You better let somebody love you, before it's too late." These lyrics describe both Cash's empathy for those who have made wrong decisions in life, and also his own redemption. Cash had battled his addictions until late in his career, and it was finally when he let June love him fully that he understood the importance of fighting off his demons.

These three songs mirror Cash's viewpoint on criminal intention, and his own misgivings. "Streets of Laredo" provides sympathy for those who have done wrong. "Sam Hall" expresses Cash's understanding of the motives and actions of criminals. Finally, "Desperado" serves as a cautionary warning to those who have hurt people in their lives. Cash was always empathetic toward criminals, understanding that they were often misguided. Also, as a result of his own experiences, Cash's guilt over his mistakes emerges in these songs as well. Hilburn

accurately notes, “If Cash understood the soul of a convict, he also knew the faith of a believer” (337). A particularly revealing scenario was when Cash performed at Folsom Prison in January of 1968. On the day of the concert, Cash performed a song written by an inmate Glen Sherley. The song stuck with Cash, and Sherley’s character intrigued him as he wished to get him paroled (Hilburn 326-30). Cash was successful in his attempt to free Sherley, and a letter Cash had written to him was particularly insightful, “We believe you are a man of destiny... The name Glen Sherley is to become a legend, a reminder to all men in prison that no matter how long, how...low they go, someone cares for them” (Hilburn 400). Cash had put his faith into a man he virtually did not know. Their short correspondences compelled Cash to fight for his honor though. Cash had worked beyond paroling Sherley, as he offered him direct assistance with his career. He did not abandon him once granting his freedom, but rather aimed to provide him the means for a brand new start (Hilburn 330). However, Sherley committed suicide in 1978 and Cash was deeply upset, yet never mentioned him in his 1993 autobiography (Hilburn 440). Also, in an interview from 2000, Sherley was brought up and Cash had stated, “He lived a very good productive life for many, many years until he had a tragic ending from...’ Cash hesitated, then continued, ‘well...actually...cancer” (Streissguth 187). Cash’s inconsistent statements and treatment of Sherley’s death furthers the idea he was an inconsistent man. Cash may have not wanted to admit that he had failed Sherley and that his story wasn’t the ideal.

However, this is a prime example of Cash’s empathy for others, specifically those involved in criminal activity. Cash was able to look beyond his record and search for a deeper meaning within Sherley. His death could also contribute to Cash’s guilt, as he could have felt there was more he could have done to help Sherley. Although his suicide complicates his redemption story, it still prevails as a testament to Cash’s understanding and connection with

those who have done wrong. Specifically, the track “I Hung My Head” denotes another strong biographical incident that etched out what kind of man Cash was.

In 1982, on Christmas evening, Cash, June, their son John Carter and a few other family members and friends were enjoying the holiday in Jamaica. Suddenly, a group of robbers burst through the doors of their house. After holding a gun to both John Carter and his friend’s head and holding them hostage and robbing them of a great deal of their belongings, they locked them in the basement. After Cash broke down the door and someone called the cops, the authorities acted quickly on the manhunt for these criminals. The gunman was killed the same night by the police, and the others a few weeks later (Cash 36-41).

The incident was traumatic, yet Cash’s statements about the deaths of the robbers prove to be more significant. He explained in his autobiography that, “My only certainties are that I grieve for desperate young men and the societies that produce and suffer so many of them, and I felt that I knew those boys. We had a kinship, they and I: I knew how they thought, I knew how they needed. They were like me” (Cash 41). This comment perfectly illustrates Cash’s empathy toward others, specifically those who have committed crimes. As stated in the comparison of the other three songs, Cash really believed he understood the mindset of criminals. He knew that they mainly act out of pain and suffering and he felt that it was rarely out of pure malice. Cash may have reacted to this incident out of guilt, knowing that he had been in trouble with the law, specifically when severely addicted to drugs. Cash knew what it felt like to hurt an innocent victim, how to endanger the lives of others, and how to appear to have no remorse. In his most reckless years he too had been a “criminal” in a sense. Their deaths seemed to unsettle Cash and his unrelenting empathy had poured through the pages of his autobiography, and can be transferred to his cover of “I Hung My Head.”

The song was originally recorded by Sting in 1996 and was released on the album *Mercury Falling*. Sting's version is quite upbeat, almost light hearted with horns and full instrumentals. Cash changes the song up a bit as his tone is more somber and he provides a stripped down version instrumental wise. Lyrically, this song appealed to all of Cash's emotions. It presents a cowboy who without really comprehending his actions shoots another rider. However, the lyrics paint a sympathetic picture of the killer, and the listener is provided a glimpse into his mindset. Specifically, a verse in the middle of the song when the killer is attending his hearing is unsettling. "I felt the power / Of death over life / I orphaned his children / I widowed his wife / I begged their forgiveness / I wish I was dead / I hung my head." While in the courtroom, the killer realizes the weight of his actions. In this desperate moment, he attempts to plead for his redemption. Cash was a man of redemption. He believed in being given another chance, and this song hones in on the lives society destroys when they offer no leeway with criminals. These lyrics allowed Cash to connect with his empathetic viewpoint on criminals, and then the frequent cruelty of the justice system, as the killer is condemned to death. Finally, the song presents a religious element in the final lyrics as the killer is about to be executed and hallucinates that he sees the man he killed, "And we'd ride together / To kingdom come / I prayed for God's mercy / For soon I'd be dead / I hung my head." The ending of the song allows for solace in the fact that he will be in God's grace, yet there is a tinge of sadness as the killer is repentant.

The song connects with the incident in Jamaica as Cash felt that he understood the criminals. He wished to be sympathetic toward their case, and if given the choice, would most likely not have condemned them to death. The fact that they were killed right on the spot seemed to be what upset Cash most, as he called the police "action-oriented" (Cash 41). The police did

not rely on the justice system to punish the men, but rather simply used violence to solve the problem. Just like the killer in “I Hung My Head,” the criminals could have felt guilty. They could have repented their actions if they were given the ability to live. The song allows these aspects to be explored, and the killer can be viewed in a compassionate light. Cash connects with the guilt that accompanies wrongdoing and his empathetic viewpoint stands out in this song. Just like Glen Sherley, the men from the robbery were simply misunderstood in Cash’s eyes. He felt they needed someone like himself to show them mercy, and the road to redemption.

Overall, guilt and empathy are major themes on the tracks “Streets of Laredo,” “Sam Hall,” “Desperado,” and “I Hung My Head.” These all come together to gain a better understanding of Cash’s character, as he was an extremely sympathetic individual. He was constantly rooting for those who had made mistakes, believing that anyone could be redeemed. These songs have added significance when compared to Cash’s criminal history and his experiences with Glen Sherley and the robbery in Jamaica. These biographical events create a clear connection to Cash’s consistent actions and responses of empathy and guilt. Next, I will delve into the final themes of the album, religion and death, as Cash had finally accepted his past and looked on to his final destination.

### *Religion & Death*

As previously stated, *American IV* was recorded at a pivotal time for Cash. His failing health caused him to reflect back on his life. Specifically, his dedication to his religion came into focus, as he knew he was nearing his death. The album reflects his impending passing, as many of the songs directly correlate with the idea of accepting one’s death. It is within this section that the most significant tracks lie. The songs that fit into the themes of death and religion are the ones that were closest to Cash’s heart. He had carefully constructed this album as his send off

and the last five songs hit upon this concept. “Personal Jesus” touches upon his deeply religious ways, but “The Man Comes Around” was his ultimate testament to God. The songs “Danny Boy” and “We’ll Meet Again” appear to be blatant references to death. In an interview with Hilburn Cash had explained, “he’d feared that his recording days were over when he finished *The Man Comes Around*. In fact, he had designed the last track as a farewell—a group sing-along version of “We’ll Meet Again,” (Hilburn 599). Cash was surprised to learn that Rubin was willing to work with him for another album, *American V*, but he would never come close to completing the work (Hilburn 599). However, the most significant track on the entire album is the Nine Inch Nails cover, “Hurt.” The song encompasses a grandiose understanding of what it means to die and be content in acceptance of one’s mortal ending. It is through these five tracks that Cash brought great significance to his final album.

Cash always held his religion close, and in this final album he was sure to have a few songs that acknowledged his faith. The song “Personal Jesus” is a particularly offbeat testament to God, but Cash brought his own personal meaning to the track. The song was originally recorded by Depeche Mode in 1989 for their album *Violator*. The original song is digitized, with the lyrics delivered in almost a chant-like fashion, with a futuristic feel. Cash completely revamps the song by slowing down the pace, and creating a more classic feel with a guitar and piano accompanying him. His careful delivery makes it much easier to understand the lyrics, which mirrors the normal fashion of church hymns. In this sense, when the listener can fully understand the lyrics, they fully grasp the message of devotion. When taken out of context of the song, the lyrics could easily pass for a hymn, “Your own, personal, Jesus / someone to hear your prayers, / someone who cares.” These lyrics could speak to the daily demands of our society, and how everyone can have their own personal Jesus. “It’s where do you find your comfort, your

counsel,” he [Cash] told NPR, “your shoulder to lean on, your hand to hold to, your personal Jesus” (Brown 150). Religion doesn’t have to take place within the confines of the church, but rather within the confines of one’s mind. This song could be Cash’s statement of the changing world, and the fact that religion can still be prevalent. Thomson points out,

The original was a song about giving yourself over completely to a lover, idolizing them to obsessive, disturbing lengths until they became God-like; in Depeche Mode’s version, the religious framework was all metaphor. Cash demolished this dual meaning and simply turned it into an evangelical hymn to his own, very idiosyncratic faith; in his hands it really *was* personal, a message to a God who he felt finally understood him and whom he understood in return. (214)

Overall, the song creates a clear outline of Cash’s profound dedication, specifically in his time of reflection. However, the song “The Man Comes Around” was his true masterpiece that expressed all of his feelings toward religion.

Cash had grown up in a Baptist family and had always devoted himself to his religion and studying it. He also recorded a number of albums directly dedicated to his faith (Twomey 224). His faith steered him throughout his life, often taking a hit when he made a wrong turn in life. Cash’s complicated relationship with God and religion was summed up brilliantly by lead singer of U2, Bono:

To me, Johnny Cash—with all his contradictions—was a quintessential character of the scriptures, or at least the characters in the Bible that interested me, Bono says. ‘I remember at Trinity College [in Dublin] when someone put out a pamphlet pointing out how flawed all the people in the Bible were...David was an adulterer, Moses was a murderer, Jacob was a cheater. These were some wild blokes. Well, one day someone put

out the same pamphlet, but wrote on it something like ‘That’s why I’m a believer. If God had time for these flawed characters, then God has time for me.’ And I think Johnny and I shared that view. (Hilburn 538)

When considering Bono’s viewpoint, Cash’s relationship with God makes a great deal of sense. In times of despair and sorrow, Cash knew he could still turn to his faith. He knew that he could turn to God when all others had turned their back on him. A clear example of his contradictory relationship with God occurred in 1967, when Cash was nearly at an all-time low. In his autobiography, he recounted feeling distant from everyone on Earth, as well as God, which forced him to seek an end. He set out for Nickajack Cave and planned to never reemerge (Cash 170). It is within this distance from God, nearing death on his own accord, that his faith was reaffirmed. Cash explained that in the midst of a severely drug-induced state he began to feel a sense of clarity, and his focus shifted to God. “There in Nickajack Cave I became conscious of a very clear, simple idea: I was not in charge of my destiny. I was not in charge of my own death. I was going to die at God’s time, not mine. I hadn’t prayed over my decision to seek death in the cave, but that hadn’t stopped God from intervening” (Cash 171). With his newfound strength, he found his way out of the cave and at the opening was June, waiting with open arms (Cash 171).

This event is an example of how this album is a musical memoir. In one of the monumental moments of his life, he had found his “Personal Jesus.” Lurking behind his innermost negative thoughts was the God he had always believed in. These moments of hardship followed by redemption are what Cash lived for. He was able to mark this as a time that brought him closer to faith, and the song “Personal Jesus” as well as his personal vision, “The Man Comes Around,” are true testaments to these moments. These songs mark moments and themes for Cash that were significant. For example, he used this album to once again stress to listeners

the importance of his religion. “The Man Comes Around” was a song clearly devoted to his religion, and the amount of energy Cash placed within it was a clear indication that it fits within his musical memoir.

“The Man Comes Around” made its debut on *American IV*, holding great significance as the only new track on the album. The song begins with Cash reciting from the Book of Revelation from the Bible. This prophetic book foreshadows the Earth’s demise and the consequences for those who have sinned. In the spoken verse he says, “And behold, a white horse” This direct quotation could be interpreted to represent Christ’s physical appearance, with an emphasis on the purity of the color white. There is deep symbolism embedded within the lyrics and the verses quoted throughout the song. After Cash’s narration of a verse, the song begins with an acoustic guitar accompanying Cash’s clear voice that speaks of our inevitable judgment day. The building instrumentals and Cash’s enthusiasm propel the song toward the chorus. The song features a number of allusions and direct quotes from the Bible. The lyrics are purely religious with predictions of judgment day. The most important thing to note about this song was its importance to Cash. It was the most meaningful track not only on the album but arguably in his career. In a conversation with Hilburn, Cash indicated the need for help from God for this final record, “I called upon Jesus. He stood with me. I can never praise Him enough for all his blessings.’ Cash again had to pause. ‘But I tried to praise Him with ‘The Man Comes Around.’ If someone is still listening to my music fifty years from now...” He paused, then repeated, “...if someone is listening at all, I hope they’re listening to that song” (Hilburn 600). The song was Cash’s tribute to God, and he hoped that he would be serving him properly through this musical homage. Cash felt confident in the piece, as “Ever since finishing ‘The Man Comes Around,’ Cash was no longer looking to make a big statement” (Hilburn 624). Clearly the

song held a great significance to Cash, and he was hoping to praise his God and enlighten his fans on his religious viewpoints.

In his deep reflection upon the world's judgment day, Cash inevitably contemplated the day when he would face the Lord. Therefore, the song delves deeper than discussing the universal judgment day. A set of lyrics that specifically speak to this idea are, "Whoever is unjust, let him be unjust still. / Whoever is righteous, let him be righteous still. / Whoever is filthy, let him be filthy still." Essentially, these lyrics state that when Jesus returns, the fate of an individual is sealed. Those who have been unjust will not be changed by his coming. But rather, Jesus' arrival creates a sense of finality. There will be no more time for repenting or time for good deeds to be done. Cash creates three categories in these lyrics, the unjust, righteous and filthy. Unjust suggests someone who has made wrong decisions consistently. Righteous points to someone who has made the virtuous choices, and will be saved. Finally, the filthy are those that have unclean hearts and consciousness. When considering these lyrics the song reflects Cash's own viewpoint upon facing his death. At that point in his life, Cash had finally come to terms with himself. He had fully faced his mistakes and reconciled his relationship with God. He did not have to worry about being filthy as he had repented for his sins. With death lurking, Cash knew his soul had to be clear. He only feared if he was unjust. He had made a lot of mistakes in life but could only hope his repentance would be enough. Therefore, whenever his judgment day was to arrive, Cash was hopeful that he would be permitted to cross over to heaven.

With his failing health and head swirling with reflections on religion and life, it is only fitting that his last album would also have a few songs dedicated to the topic of death. Cash did not view death as a treacherous and horrid ending to his journey. He was not afraid after having a small taste of the other side. A close call occurred in 1998 during a stay in the hospital for his

heart issues and double pneumonia when he was on the verge of death. Cash explained he felt he was going toward a light, “I began to drift smoothly into its very center, where it was so much better than anything I’d ever experienced that I can’t possibly describe it. I was unbelievably happy. I’ve never felt such utter joy” (Cash 259). He subsequently continues about how he was devastated when he woke up, but eventually regained a mindset to where he was grateful to be alive (Cash 259). With this glimpse, Cash had the knowledge that the actual experience of dying would not be as terrifying as he once thought. However, later in his autobiography, Cash explains, “When death starts beating the door down, you need to be reaching for your shotgun” (Cash 273). He also stressed the idea of telling stories in order to keep memories alive when your time is running short (Cash 273). Overall, Cash seemed to be realistic about death, both fearing its arrival and accepting its purpose. His song choices of “Danny Boy,” “We’ll Meet Again,” and “Hurt” demonstrate his feelings on his impending demise.

“Danny Boy” is a traditional song, often linked with Irish traditions. The song is regularly used at funerals, therefore having a strong connection with death. It laments one’s own passing, and the song suggests waiting for someone after death. “And I will know, though soft you tread above me, / And then my grave will richer, sweeter be. / And you’ll bend down and tell me that you love me, / And I will rest in peace until you come to me.” These lyrics suggest that when one passes, they wait in anticipation for their loved ones on the other side. Although Cash himself may have feared death, there was something he feared more. Cash’s health issues had escalated so much over the years that June was often overlooked when it came to her concerns (Hilburn 608). Therefore, it is safe to assume Cash really believed he would be the first to pass. This song could be a testament to his assumption that he would soon pass and June would wait by his grave.

The song “We’ll Meet Again” echoes similar themes, as Cash was planning for his departure. As previously stated, the song was meant to be a farewell, and Cash was fairly certain it was his formal send off to the recording world. Therefore, the 1939 song originally recorded by Vera Lynn had abundant significance. As the final track on the album, the song served as an adieu to his fans, family and loved ones. Assumedly, there was also a weighted significance of the song in relation to June. He knew both their health was failing, so he could assume that they would not be apart long. The lyrics emphasize the inevitable reunion between two people, as “We’ll meet again / Don’t know where / Don’t know when / But I know / We’ll meet again / Some sunny day.” Cash knew his end was nearing, and this song seemed like the perfect sendoff for his musical memoir. He was a man who valued his loved ones, and wanted to formally craft an end to his story. The chorus’s singing along conjures up images of friends all joining together to belt out the final lyrics of a loved song. This ending could be a nod to all of the people who had helped him with his career. Memorable musician comrades such as Waylon Jennings and Luther Perkins would be sure to join Cash in this final exaltation. The song is a warm sendoff, with a strong encouragement that Cash would not be alone in death, as he would be able to hold onto all of the memories of those he loved. Overall, the song holds great importance as the closing to the album; however, it does not prove to be the most significant.

The track “Hurt” is truly the culmination of all of the themes in one song, with an emphasis on death. It features reminiscences, feelings of suffering, despair, regret, guilt, empathy, religion and death. The song delves into every facet of Cash’s life and summed up his condition at the time of recording. The song was originally recorded in 1994 by Nine Inch Nails for their album *The Downward Spiral*. Their version is extremely slow paced, mainly accompanied by an acoustic guitar and piano. Lead singer Trent Reznor offers a whisper-like

delivery of the verses followed by a bolder and rougher belting of the chorus. Cash's version quickens the pace a bit but maintains the same musical elements. His delivery is heartfelt, emphasizing more meaningful lines. Cash's emotions seethe through the lyrics and the recording makes it evident that the song was meaningful to him. Originally, Cash was reluctant to cover the song, but it was the lyrics that swayed his opinion. Rubin continually presented the song to Cash through mix tapes the two were exchanging, but Cash would never mention the track. Finally, Rubin attached a note asking Cash to consider the song by reading its words (Hilburn 591). The powerful words behind the song are what propelled Cash to begin its recording. When reading the lyrics, they seem to be virtually written for Cash. The painful chorus is moving, "What have I become / My sweetest friend / Everyone I know goes away / In the end / And you could have it all / My empire of dirt / I will let you down / I will make you hurt." In essence, these lyrics brutally look death in the face. The song confronts fears of dying, and the idea of passing on a legacy. It is an unflinching look into the unknown.

Each aspect of the chorus seems to speak directly to Cash. Breaking the chorus down bit by bit will help create a vivid image of its meaning. "What have I become / My sweetest friend" seems to echo Cash's darkest moments. In his bleakest days, in a drug-induced state, it can only be imagined how many times Cash had asked himself, "What have I become?" This speaks not only to himself, but also to his "sweetest friend" meaning both June and his family members. He knew that he had brutally hurt dozens of loved ones between his infidelity, recklessness and addiction. Next, "Everyone I know goes away / in the end" speaks directly to the pain of loss and suffering Cash was familiar with. Starting with the heart-wrenching loss of his brother Jack, Cash knew what it meant to lose someone. At this point in his career, he had lost both his parents and countless friends as well. Hilburn notes the added significance of this line when considering

that Cash's close friend and musical partner Waylon Jennings had died in February of 2002 (594). Therefore, Cash was being chased by death. He knew that his end was looming as well, and that in death he would find himself alone. This lyric echoed the fact that in death, one must finally face themselves and what they have done.

Finally, the last part, "And you could have it all / My empire of dirt / I will let you down / I will make you hurt" proves to be the most significant. These lyrics are written in the present tense, indicating that Cash still had the power to do all of this. He could have taken the liberty to change them to past tense, but he must have sought meaning in keeping it the same. Cash was offering up his empire, as his family *could* have it all. "Could" indicates that it is not something of value, but rather something that his family members may even scoff at his offering. This could be because he is offering an empire of "dirt." All he has to offer is broken down, to the most basic remains of the Earth. All his riches and fame can be boiled down simply into the dirt he will be buried with. When he passes there is nothing of meaning left for his family. Cash also acknowledges that he will still let his loved ones down. He has hurt them immensely in the past, and he still has the ability within him. Although he has mellowed with age and come to terms with his past, he still has the capacity to hurt. He could not shake the feeling that he was a disappointment. His father's bitter resentment toward him and refusal to offer adoration still resonated within Cash. He still felt that pain and felt it radiating through his system. He knew that his family could also not fully forgive him for his past transgressions. Upon his death, his daughters would still remember the nights they went to bed without knowing where he was. He knew inevitably, then, that he would still be letting them down. As a result, he would still make them hurt. The wounds were not fully healed and his family would still be affected by his negative judgments. "Dirt" and "hurt" fittingly rhyme, as from the dirt he would still be inflicting

hurt. His family would still be reeling from the times that Cash had been engulfed by his negative inhibitions.

The “empire of dirt” could be specifically referring to the symbolic House of Cash museum, which contained all Cash’s memorabilia for fans and had been closed for a number of years when he was working on the track. Therefore, the dilapidated museum seemed to be the perfect location in the eyes of music video director Mark Romanek for “Hurt” (Hilburn 601). Its broken down state is a perfect allusion to this lyric. The country mogul’s own museum was in disarray and no longer open, making it a perfect comparison to an “empire of dirt.” Cash had fame, riches, and a long music career, but this would provide no comfort in the face of loss. His fame and prior riches would mean nothing when his family members were forced to face his death. The music video perfectly depicted this notion, as it chronicled Cash’s life story. Appropriately, it was a clear window into Cash’s true condition. He did not appear as a wealthy, gleaming country music star, but rather a broken down old man, months away from death. The video and song portrayed that Cash battled his regret in the idea he knew he already let those in his life down so many times, and had continually hurt them. In his final years, Cash was forced to reflect upon his darkest days and understand that his family members could still harbor resentment for him for his previous actions. Clearly, the chorus alone perfectly frames a musical memoir. The themes present in the lyrics are significant, and they provided Cash with a vessel to look back on his life.

Upon recording, it was apparent that the song had tremendous weight to it. There was so much meaning wrapped into the four minute track that it was impossible not to get trapped within its words. Cash himself felt moved by its power: “I probably sang the song 100 times before I went and recorded it, because I had to make it mine,” he said, “It’s a song I wish I had

written. Back in the 60s I think I could have written something like this” (Thomson 213). Cash had clearly identified with the song and was confident in his rendition. He was sure to make the song his own, even tweaking a lyric to his preference. The Nine Inch Nails version features the lyrics, “I wear this crown of shit / Upon my liar's chair,” which Cash changed to “I wear this crown of thorns / Upon my liar's chair.” The religious allusion was a personal touch that aided Cash’s version. The idea that Cash wears the crown of thorns is significant. Just like the ideas portrayed in “Personal Jesus,” everyone is entitled to their own bit of religion. Cash’s crown of thorns was his guilt. That was his cross to bear, burden to bury and sin to resolve. Just as Christ wore the crown of thorns dutifully, Cash must do the same thing. The liar’s chair furthers this ideal, as he has not earned his throne. Christ rightfully sits upon his throne in heaven, yet Cash sits in his chair meant for liars. His discretions and misguided decisions have caused him to sit in the chair for sinners. Although he has made amends and feels he has repented, this connects with the fear, “What if it is not enough?” Cash could be dealing with the realization that his sins may have been too grand. He may not be wearing his crown of thorns with enough remorse. His devotion to God could still be seen as a sham. There is great power within these lines as they play upon his insecurities. Cash’s lyric directly contrasts Reznor’s version, “I wear this crown of shit.” Cash removes the cringe-worthy image and replaces it with the deeply symbolic “thorns.” This simple switch in words completely changed the weight of these lyrics, and thus allowed Cash to fully capture himself within the song.

The song radiated power, and those around Cash knew it fit him perfectly. Rubin explains, “To me, it was a song about an older person reflecting on their life with remorse. It was so heartbreaking” (Hilburn 591). The track is immensely heartbreaking, and the beauty lies within its pain. It was a clear summation of Cash’s life. The song feels like a journey through

Cash's life, a thorough account of all he had been through and all the mistakes he had made. Yet Cash's tone aims to be upbeat, reflecting his internal optimism that maybe not all was lost. However, the final lyrics are a clear vision of the end, "If I could start again / A million miles away / I would keep myself / I would find a way." Cash has finally accepted his mistakes with this song. He is openly acknowledging that he has hurt those close to him and that he suffers from bitter regret. Cash's voice seems to quiver in these lines as the music swells. He is convincing, as the listener wants to give Cash another chance. However, at his advanced age Cash had run out of chances. He had lamented his regrets, laid all his cards on the table, but it was time to face his God.

Overall, the song "Hurt" is all encompassing of Cash's career and life. It touches upon all of the major themes that lie within my analysis of *American IV*. However, it has its most prevalent emphasis on death, as Cash looked it square in the face as if to say, "I'm ready." The tracks "Danny Boy" and "We'll Meet Again" only work to bolster this dynamic song's meaning. Also, its religious aspects harbor the significance found in his deeply sincere songs geared toward God. "Personal Jesus" and "The Man Comes Around" only work with "Hurt" in the fact Cash was most likely accepting of his fate. Although reluctant to leave the physical world, he knew his time had come, and he wouldn't be apart from those he loved for an eternity, as they would be reunited in salvation.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Johnny Cash was a man who was constantly changing. His persona underwent a series of reinventions and he seemed uncertain of how he would like to be portrayed in the media. He was flawed and broken, haunted by his own personal demons. He had intentions of always doing the right thing, but could rarely hold onto that ideal. He aimed to be the best man, husband, father,

and Christian he could but often fell short. The average man can relate to these failures. Cash did not embody the American dream in the typical sense. He did not have the white picket fence with the perfect job and perfect family. He had committed infidelity. He had been dropped from a major record label. He had battled drug addiction for the majority of his life. He had lost a sibling at a young age. He had a father who never felt Johnny measured up his expectations. Cash had experienced failure and redemption all in front of the public eye. His fans witnessed the majority of the trials and tribulations but were still able to stand beside his music. Fans could see themselves in this flawed character. Cash was real, relatable and authentic in his inconsistency.

Throughout Cash's career it was questioned if he was trend jumper, or if he was often trying to cash into trends. For example, his persona as "the Man in Black" as well as a criminal during the Folsom concert, created a changing idea of Cash. Therefore, it could be questioned if Cash was aiming to regain fame with his final album. In 2002 pop music was dominating the charts. Eminem had the number one selling album, followed by Nelly, Avril Lavigne and Britney Spears. These artists focused on scaling the charts and produced music that would please their eager fans. The digital age was emerging and these artists were pressed to embody popularity through both their music and their persona. However, Johnny Cash was not influenced by these pressures. When *American IV: The Man Comes Around* was released, it was not his intention to grasp one last bit of fame. He was not searching to benefit from Rick Rubin's prior commercial success. Instead, Cash was attempting to strip away the prior conceptions of who he was as a musician and as a man. With allusions to his departed brother Jack, and his eternal love for June, Cash opens up fully to his audience. He abandons any concern for his perception. He was proud of the work and felt it was the best record he and Rubin had created to date (Thomson 221). The

album was a pure and honest form of communication and he used the album as a way of fully expressing himself in light of extinguishing life.

Cash unearthed all of his fears and regrets in this final album, and that served as his musical memoir. This form of memoir is just as pure and convincing as any other written word. If anything, it is more convincing as Cash's vocals and the instrumentals create a clever canvas. His voice paints the picture of the emotional turmoil one goes through in their final months of life. He creates something refreshingly real and rich in meaning. It is both literary and creative inspiration as Cash captures the themes throughout a lifetime in fifteen tracks. These songs cover such a wide variety of topics and music genres that it is undeniably effective. His form of memoir is one that could be adapted by other music artists as they aim to capture a true essence of their personality through music. Cash exemplifies the power within an album, and the ability to convey great meaning within music. Therefore, it is clear that *American IV: The Man Comes Around* captures the essence of a memoir. He creates a new form of the memoir genre and leaves an indelible mark on music.

Continually, this memoir's honesty is what made *American IV* his most raw and inspiring album in his career. Cash had abandoned all of his previous personas. He was no longer a man filled with potential political rebellion, or actions of infidelity. He was simply an old man nearing his death. He removed all of his previous masks and unveiled his real identity. He abandoned any notion of genre, and picked songs that were broader in scope. The tracks were simply depictions of Cash's life, lyrically and musically. He did not feel the need to choose a genre to confine himself within. He used this album to fully explore his musical interests, and create a message. The memoir is only successful because he abandons all expectations. He leaves beyond the idea he was a country star. He ignores the persona that he was a political rebel. He

only assumes the role as J.R., his childhood nickname and true persona. The real Johnny Cash lies within these fifteen tracks as they span his entire life.

Overall, the album covered a wide variety of topics and important milestones for Cash. The themes within the album of reminiscences, suffering, despair and regret, guilt and empathy are all present. But notably, Cash also delved into religion and death. He used this album as a way to connect to all of the prior experiences that affected him most. Clearly, this album came from the depths of Cash's soul. He was vulnerable, pained and remorseful in his final months. Cash created a new kind of memoir that allows listeners to see into his final thoughts. Beyond just significance, his music had relevance, even within his final years. As described in his obituary, "Johnny Cash's appeal transcended boundaries of class, generation and geography" (Holden). He had the ability to directly relate to fans, and his music seemed to speak to people in all walks of life. His desire to be an authentic American was continually captivating. *American IV* was the perfect send off for Cash, because it allowed him to surrender all of his pent up feelings, and present a cohesive, relatable and truthful narrative of his life.

#### Works Cited

Brown, Jake. *Rick Rubin: In the Studio*. ON, Canada: ECW Press, 2009. Print.

Cash, Johnny. *American IV: The Man Comes Around*. American Recordings, 2002. CD.

- Cash, Johnny with Patrick Carr. *Cash: The Autobiography Johnny Cash*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997. Print.
- Couser, Thomas. *Memoir: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- Edwards, Leigh. *Johnny Cash and the Paradox of American Identity*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009. Print.
- Ellison, Curtis W. *Country Music Culture: From Hard Times to Heaven*. Jackson [Miss.]: University Press of Mississippi, 1995. Print. Studies in Popular Culture.
- Hilburn, Robert. *Johnny Cash: The Life*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2013. Print.
- Holden, Stephen. "Johnny Cash, Country Music's Bare-Bones Realist, Dies at 71." *The New York Times* 12 Sept. 2003. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 3 May 2014.
- Jennings, Dana Andrew. *Sing Me Back Home: Love, Death, and Country Music*. 1st ed. New York: Faber and Faber, 2008. Print.
- Miller, Nancy. "The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir." *Modern Language Association* 122.2 (2007): 537–548. Print.
- Rak, Julie. "Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity." *Genre* 37.3-4 (2004): 483–504. *dbproxy.lasalle.edu:2617*. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.
- Silverman, Jonathan. "A 'Dove with Claws'?": Johnny Cash as Radical." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 1.2 (2008): 91–106. *dbproxy.lasalle.edu:2247*. Web. 18 Apr. 2014.
- . *Nine Choices: Johnny Cash and American Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010. Print.

Stewart Foley, Michael. "A Politics of Empathy: Johnny Cash, the Vietnam War, and the 'Walking Contradiction' Myth Dismantled." *Popular Music and Society* (2013): 1–22.

Print.

Streissguth, Michael. *Johnny Cash: The Biography*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006.

Print.

Thomson, Graeme. *The Resurrection of Johnny Cash: Hurt, Redemption, and American Recordings*. England: Jawbone Press, 2011. Print.

Tunnell, Kenneth, and Mark Hamm. "Social Justice & Social Context in the Music of Johnny Cash." *Journal of the Institute of Justice and International Studies* 9 (2009): 53–61. Print.

Twomey, Jay. "The Biblical Man in Black: Paul in Johnny Cash/Johnny Cash in Paul." *Biblical Interpretation* 19.2 (2011): 223–252. Print.