In the mid-1960s, Johnny Cash and June Carter appeared on Pete Seeger’s Rainbow Quest TV show. As always on Pete’s shows, the show was not rehearsed. Like the music of folk singers which was always austere and minimalist in nature, the setting for this show followed that pattern. This was before Johnny and June were married and before Johnny went into rehab for his excessive use of amphetamines. It took a lot of effort for me to get a copy of this.
Pete Seeger’s Rainbow Request

Coyote and Apache Tears
Pete Seeger’s Rainbow Request continued:

*The Ballad of the Talking Leaves*
Pete Seeger’s Rainbow Request continued:

*As Long as the Grass Shall Grow*
Storytellers

One thing Peter LaFarge, Buffy Sainte-Marie and Johnny Cash have in common is that they are all basically storytellers. This tends to be true of most First Nations people. The art of storytelling was always a highly regarded and highly valued trait. They just went one step further and turned their stories into music or a story with musical accompaniment.

One of the most famous stories they ever told is in the song The Ballad of Ira Hayes.
While lots of people knew about what Ira Hayes had done in the war, very few knew about the theft of his people’s water rights that prevented them from doing the farming to support themselves that they had done for over 2000 years.
Johnny Cash ran into a great deal of resistance to this song. CBS did not want to record it. Radio stations refused to play it. They threatened to not play all of Johnny’s music because of it, and a movement was put into force to have Johnny kicked out of the Country Music Ass. He responded by putting his career on the line, and took out full page ads at his own expense in Billboard magazine and in newspapers throughout the country condemning the radio disc jockeys and their owners for being dishonest bigots who were afraid to let the people hear the truth.
They questioned Johnny’s patriotism, and he told them his honesty and integrity was more important. In the end, a few radio stations had the courage to play it and it became a big hit, and all the others were then forced to play it as well. The Ballad of Ira Hayes went to #3 on the national charts and stayed at the top for over a half year.

West and in which I was inspired by the Native American songwriter Peter LaFarge, was another intense research project. I dove into primary and secondary sources, immersing myself in the tragic stories of the Cherokee and the Apache, among others, until I was almost as raw as Peter. By the time I actually recorded the album I carried a heavy load of sadness and outrage; I felt every word of those songs, particularly “Apache Tears” and “The Ballad of Ira Hayes.” I meant every word, too. I was long past the point of pulling my punches.
The Ballad of Ira Hayes
At the conclusion of his benefit concert, a prayer was said for Johnny, asking that he may live to a ripe old age. He had lived a reckless life, and had many brushes with death, but this prayer appears to have been a blessing and a prophecy.

After putting on the benefit concert for the Rosebud Sioux, Johnny was taken on a tour of Wounded Knee.
Bigfoot
Just over a year before doing the Rosebud concert and visiting Wounded Knee, Johnny Cash faced his own personal tragedy.
Just over a year before doing the Rosebud concert and visiting Wounded Knee, Johnny Cash faced his own personal tragedy.
When Johnny Cash came out of the dark cave, his mother and June Carter were there to greet him. At that time, June and Johnny were not married though they were in a romantic relationship. June had sensed that there was something terribly wrong and had flown in from California. Somehow they discovered that Johnny’s was at the cave, and they went there.

He told his mother that God had saved him from killing himself, and that he was now ready to do whatever was necessary to get off drugs. His mother and June then took him home where he began the very painful process of detoxification. June contacted Dr. Nat Winston, and Nat came to his house every day, holding his feet to the fire and giving him vital support. I think it is worth reading his account of that experience:
It was the same nightmare every night, and it affected my stomach—I suppose because the stomach was where the pills had landed, exploded, and done their work. I’d be lying in bed on my back or curled up on my side. The cramps would come and go, and I’d roll over, doze off, and go to sleep.

Then all of a sudden a glass ball would begin to expand in my stomach. My eyes were closed, but I could see it. It would grow to the
size of a baseball, a volleyball, then a basketball. And about the time I felt that ball was twice the size of a basketball, it lifted me up off the bed.

I was in a strange state, half-asleep and half-awake. I couldn’t open my eyes, and I couldn’t close them. It lifted me off the bed to the ceiling, and when it would go through the roof, the glass ball would explode and tiny, infinitesimal slivers of glass would go out into my bloodstream from my stomach. I could feel the pieces of glass being pumped through my heart into the veins of my arms, my legs, my feet, my neck, and my brain, and some of them would come out the pores of my skin. Then I’d float back down through the ceiling onto my bed and wake up. I’d turn over on my side for a while, unable to sleep. Then I’d lie on my back, doze off, get almost asleep—and the same nightmare would come again.
I never imagined a hole in the roof. I just went right through it without an opening. . . . I wanted to scream, but I couldn’t.

I also noted that as well as the glass coming out of my skin and the corners of my eyes, I had the old problem of splinters, briers, and thorns in my flesh, and sometimes worms.

Eventually—slowly, with relapses and setbacks—I regained my strength and sanity and I rebuilt my connection to God. By November 11, 1967, I was able to face an audience again, performing straight for the first time in a decade.
but surprised, almost shocked, to discover that the stage without drugs was not the frightening place I’d imagined it to be. I was relaxed that night. I joked with the audience between numbers. I amazed myself.

What happened then was even more startling. Vivian divorced me. June and I got married (on March 1, 1968). I went to Folsom Prison in California and recorded my Live at Folsom Prison album, which got me a huge hit (for the second time) with “Folsom Prison Blues” and lit a big fire under my career. The following year The Johnny Cash Show started up, putting me on ABC network television for an hour a week, coast to coast. Then, on March 3, 1970, John Carter Cash was born, and my happiness grew and grew. Sobriety suited me.
Cash’s *honesty* and *authenticity* got him in trouble again when he announced on his national TV show that he was a Christian.

The most significant instance was when I made a public profession of faith on my network TV show. It wasn’t something I was driven to do by an urge to convert anybody or spread the word of the Lord; I did it because people kept asking me where I stood, in interviews and letters to the network, and I thought I ought to make it clear that yes, I was a Christian. I sang those gospel songs on the show not just because I liked them as music (which I surely did) and *definitely* not because I wanted to appear holier than thou, but because they were part of my musical heritage—our musical heritage—and they were part of *me*. Yes, in short, I meant the words I was singing. When I actually came out and said the words “I am a Christian” on TV, that was the context: introducing a gospel song.
ABC didn’t like it. I had one of the producers come up to me and tell me that I really oughtn’t be talking about God and Jesus on network television.

to my belief before I spoke up, getting my spiritual high by singing gospel songs and trying, despite my many faults and my continuing attraction to all seven deadly sins, to treat my fellow man as Christ would. There never was any dividing line between Johnny Cash the Christian and plain old Johnny Cash.

The worldly consequences of my declaration were severe, not just in lost record sales but also in some of the reactions from religious people, which ranged from attempts to use me for their own purposes to condemnations and exclusions from their particular folds. But I’ve never regretted speaking up, and I believe that when I get
Johnny Cash was invited to the White House by just about all the US Presidents, including Nixon, Carter, Reagan and Clinton, and he said he truly liked all of them as people, but he never voted for any of them except Jimmy Carter who was a cousin of June Carter. It seems Johnny favored the underdog even in Presidential elections.

One incident that happened with Richard Nixon was particularly revealing. Nixon requested that Johnny and his band play *A Boy Named Sue*, *Welfare Cadillac* and *Okie from Muskogee*. Johnny said he would only sing *Sue* because he did not know the other songs. That avoided an ideological confrontation with the President about the messages of the songs, which Cash said “were lightning rods for antihippie and antiBlack sentiment.”
The story was somehow leaked to the press, and media reports had headlines like “Cash tells off the President”, but he tried to play down the confrontation by saying that he just did not know those songs. Otherwise, Cash said “the issue might have become the messages, but fortunately I didn’t have to deal with that.” There was a good reason that Johnny did not know the songs. He did not sing songs that heaped contempt on people because of their beliefs, their race or their income.

When Nixon was asked about it by the White House press corps, he said that “I learned that no one tells Johnny Cash what to sing” (Cash, p.286).
Instead of heaping contempt on the poor and the different as the song *Welfare Cadillac* did,

Johnny Cash sang songs that brought attention to those who were hurting and disadvantaged. He sung about empathy and justice for the poor, the exploited and those who were excluded from the rights, opportunities and benefits of society because of race, place or birth.
Instead of heaping contempt on the youth who were questioning war, the social and environmental evils and abuses of the “establishment” as the song *Okie from Muskogee* did,

Cash sang about listening and caring about what the young people were saying, and his songs called for empathy and respect for the youth of the country who were searching for better ways to live.
Cash’s Activism
All of us can see something of ourselves in Johnny Cash, both the good and the bad. And he inspired all of us to be better. He was violent at times with material things, but he was never violent with people. He did hurt a lot of people who loved him dearly by hurting himself, and he painfully and repeatedly rehabilitated himself in response to the love others had showered on him. But that was authentic too; it was part of who he was.

He had compassion and empathy for the victims of injustice, for the victims of crime and for the prisoners who were guilty and for those who were innocent, for the poor and the lonely, and for the soldiers fighting the war and for the people at home protesting the war.
In a day and age when public relations firms manage public images, and political correctness has become a substitute for compassion, tolerance and empathy, Johnny Cash’s authenticity stands alone and stands above all the image-makers and all the artificial images created.

He is a man who got censored and persecuted for his lack of patriotism for singing *The Ballad of Ira Hayes*, a song written by a Navy veteran, sung by an Air Force veteran and a song about a Marine veteran, and he got criticized and penalized for saying he was a Christian on national TV, but he did not respond with hatred toward anyone, and just went on being himself and trying to make people more compassionate and more empathetic.
Kris Kristoferson was a prisoner in San Quentin prison (armed burglary) when Johnny gave a concert there. He then aspired to a musical career. He wrote the song *Sunday Morning Coming Down*. To get Johnny’s attention to it, he had a helicopter fly over Johnny’s backyard and he dropped him the song. Johnny later recorded it, and it became one of his bigger hits.

Johnny invited Kris Kristoferson to perform on his national TV show, and he did. Before going on stage, Kris said he was scared to death that some reporter or someone else was going to find out that he was an ex-con; and, because of that, he would be repudiated, humiliated and destroyed. Johnny told him just to go out there and tell the people that he was an ex-con and get it over. They will accept you and then you will never have to feel the fear of being exposed. Because of his deep respect for Johnny, Kris did just that. He said it was the most fearful thing he ever did in his life, but it turned out to be just like what Johnny had predicted. The crowd showed compassion for Kris’ honesty and flaw, and he went on to a distinguished career.
Sunday Morning Coming Down
Drums - Another Peter LaFarge Song

Success will not come to those who shirk:
To get up in the world, get down to work.
Pochohontas - One of is last Recordings
A Summary of Johnny Cash’s Career
During the Vietnam war era and in the last 6 years when the country has been deeply divided, Americans of all sides honored and revered Johnny Cash, not because he was a sinner who found grace as some put it, but because he was a really honest and authentic human being that did not try to hide his flaws or those of society. And it was because he had great compassion for the downtrodden, the disadvantaged, the victims of oppression and greed, and for all of us who share a common human frailty, but who are sometimes not as honest about our flaws as Johnny Cash was about his. He was a lifelong Christian and a really authentic human being who truly cared about the less fortunate.
This little-known song of Johnny Cash may sum up his career, his life and his character as much as any account of his accomplishments:
It is interesting and revealing that Billy Graham, probably the most famous and revered evangelical preacher of the 20th century, asked if he could come to visit Johnny Cash. Billy felt his son did not respect him, but he saw and heard his son play Johnny Cash records all the time and knew that Johnny Cash was a hero to his son. So he thought that if he could get to know Johnny Cash, maybe he could also be a hero to his son. So after Billy’s call to Johnny, Johnny invited Billy for a visit.

Unlike the public perception, in reality it was Johnny counseling Billy instead of Billy counseling Johnny, but the two of them got to be good and longtime friends. With Johnny, even Billy Graham got to be himself and was not constrained to try to live up to his public image or persona.
Johnny Cash’s drummer, W.S. Holland, says in an interview later in these slides that “Johnny Cash was everything.” It has been said that you cannot be everything to everybody, and that you cannot please everyone. But in a strange sort of way, Johnny Cash defied that truism.

It was not because he tried to be everything to everyone, or tried to please everyone, but it was precisely because he did not try to please everyone or be everything to everyone that he, in fact, became as close as anyone has ever been to being everything to everyone. He achieved this only because he did not try to achieve it. He achieved it because he was honest and authentic; he was himself, and no one from Presidents to Billy Graham could make him be anything other than himself. He was “was everything” because everyone saw some part of who they are and who they wanted to be in Johnny Cash.
Here is another little-known song of Johnny Cash that sums up his career, his life and his character as he sings this song at a prison concert.
In an age of deceit, deception and dissimulation, Johnny Cash was a truly a rare form of compassion, empathy and, most of all, authenticity.
An Interview with Johnny Cash’s Drummer of 40+ years.
This gives you some extra perspective into the man and the musician that he was.