

Woodward

## Country Boy

The Roots of Johnny Cash

Because Johnny Cash cut his classic singles at Sun Records in Memphis and reigned for years as country royalty from his Nashville-area mansion, people tend to associate the Man in Black with Tennessee. But some of Cash's best songs—including classics like "Pickin' Time," "Big River," and "Five Feet High and Rising"—sprang from his youth in the sweltering cotton fields of Mississippi County in northeastern Arkansas. In *Country Boy*, Colin Woodward combines biography, history, and music criticism to illustrate how Cash's experiences in Arkansas shaped his life and work. The grip of the Great Depression on Arkansas's small farmers, the comforts and tragedies of family, and a bedrock of faith all lent his music the power and authenticity that so appealed to millions. Though Cash left Arkansas as an eighteen-year-old, he often returned to his home state, playing some of his most memorable and personal concerts on his native soil, where, to use Cash's phrase, he could touch his roots again. Drawing upon the country legend's songs and writings, as well as the accounts of family, fellow musicians, and chroniclers, Woodward reveals how the profound sincerity and empathy so central to Cash's music depended on his maintaining a deep connection to his native Arkansas—a place that never left his soul.

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