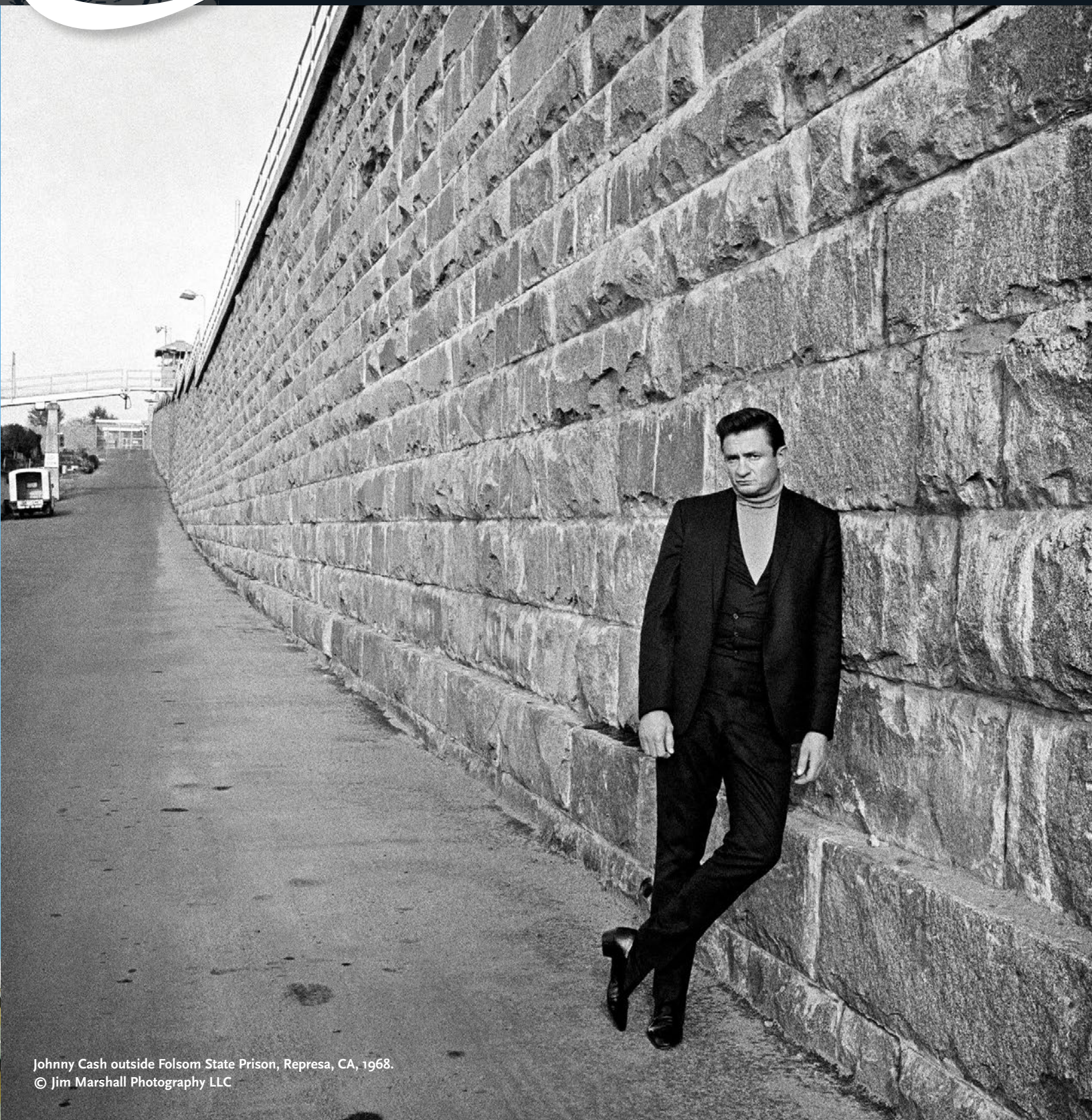


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Johnny Cash outside Folsom State Prison, Represa, CA, 1968.

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Front Cover: Johnny Cash outside Folsom State Prison, Represa, CA, 1968. © Jim Marshall Photography LLC.

Back Cover: The massive 16-story mural of Johnny Cash was erected on a building in Sacramento at L and 15th Streets. See p. 3 of the *Bulletin*. Photograph by Brittney Dawn Cook.

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Johnny Cash

Fifty Years After Folsom and San Quentin

By Mary Beth Barber

While his 1968 concert is the best known, Johnny Cash performed dozens of times in prisons. A *Sacramento Union* photographer captured the scene at this November 1966 outdoor concert. The actual Greystone Chapel — namesake of the last song on the album — looms in the background. (Courtesy of the Special Collections at the UC Davis Library.)



In the summer of 2018, a huge mural of Johnny Cash was erected in Sacramento, easily seen on the horizon when heading towards the State Capitol from the eastern part of midtown. The image was crafted by Shepard Fairey, of the Obama “Hope” poster fame, from a photo taken by rock-and-roll photographer Jim Marshall at the famed 1968 concert in Folsom State Prison that made Cash — and Folsom Prison — a legend.

Tourists and locals alike were able to view more than the mural last August, courtesy of the California State Library, Jim Marshall’s estate, and the Governor’s office. To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the legendary album, fine art prints of rarely seen photos from Cash’s recorded concerts in Folsom and San Quentin lined the public hallway of the capitol building just outside the door to Governor Brown’s office. They were publically displayed for six weeks in August and September 2018, and then donated to the State Library by Marshall’s estate for future viewings and loans.

But right away Sacramento natives began to question the image of Cash for California’s capitol city, better known for civics than country music. It turns out that Fairey had done his homework, because Cash had a history of advocating help for the downtrodden, including prison reform for inmates.

“Many things have changed over the past fifty years in the way the United States and California think about incarceration,” noted State Librarian Greg Lucas in the display’s introductory text. “One of the reasons for at least some of that change is Johnny Cash spotlighting individuals and their treatment behind bars.”

Johnny Cash’s Concerts Inside

The recorded concerts were not the first prison venues for “The Man in Black,” as he was later nicknamed. Cash headlined



The massive 16-story mural “Mass Incarceration” by Shepard Fairey was erected in the summer of 2018 on the Residence Inn hotel in midtown Sacramento at L and 15th Streets. The art keys off the photo “Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison, California” by famed photographer Jim Marshall, and was taken in January of 1968 on the day of the now-famous recorded concert. Both the photo and artwork are part of the “American Civics” series, a joint project between Fairey and the estate of Jim Marshall to highlight civic awareness and subjects, and a full “American Civics” series of fine-art prints was donated to the California State Library by Amelia Davis / Jim Marshall LLC. For more information and images view americancivics.com.

EDITOR’S NOTE

Barber is the special projects coordinator for the California State Library, and previously headed up the Arts in Corrections pilot program for the California Arts Council. Additional information and links to many of the references in this article may be found at the State Library online exhibition at www.library.ca.gov/collections/online-exhibits/johnny-cash/.

Barber and the editors of the Bulletin wish to thank the following entities for allowing the publication of photographs and other materials: Jim Marshall LLC and Amelia Davis; “Mass Incarceration” artist Shepard Fairey and OBEY GIANT ART; Special Collections at UC Davis and the Sacramento Union archives (D0350); the National Archives and its presidential collections; the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation; Government Publications section at the California State Library; the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute; and the William James Association’s Prison Arts Project / Jim Carlson.



Cash often performed with others, including the Carter Family and June Carter Cash, whom he married in March of 1968. The Carters joined him in November 1966 at Folsom Prison when the weather allowed the musicians to perform outdoors on the central yard. (Sacramento Union archives in the special collections at UC Davis).



dozens of prison concerts in at least ten states, with a large number of them in his adopted home state (at the time) of California. The first prison Cash performed in was in Texas, but his second was San Quentin State Prison on New Year's Day in 1958.

"Gigantic Revue Heralds New Year" reads the front-page headline of *The San Quentin News* for January 9, 1958. "Three Thousand San Quentin Men Cheer Stars — And Johnny Cash," reads the subhead.

The prison had a history of welcoming the new year with a seven-hour entertainment extravaganza on January 1. That year, Cash stole the show. Fellow country-music star Merle Haggard, serving time at San Quentin for petty crimes, said in his autobiography that the enthusiasm for Cash overwhelmed the other acts, including women dancing and a seventeen-piece jazz band.

Haggard and Cash later raised the ire of entertainment executives on the network-broadcast "Johnny Cash Show." According to Haggard in *My House of Memories: An Autobiography*, Cash had Haggard guest star on the family-friendly live program, where Haggard complimented Cash on the 1958 concert. When Cash said that he didn't remember Haggard in the band, Haggard bantered back, "I was in the audience!" This interchange lives in Haggard's autobiography but not necessarily in the video record, as online versions of the show have an awkward cut just where this exchange would likely have taken place.

Cash spent the years following that San Quentin New Year's performance moving between touted venues like Carnegie Hall, where he bombed after losing his voice due to excessive drug use, and incarceration facilities where he appeared to thrive. Even after the success of the Folsom and San Quentin albums, he continued to play for inmates. These events included a show at Soledad State Prison in 1980, where his performance was likely an enhancement to the successful immersive arts and music programs for inmates that was in full force at the time.

Multiple Folsom Concerts

Cash's first appearance inside the granite walls of Folsom State Prison took place about eighteen months before the recorded concert. "Folsom Inmates Brave Chill for 'Friend' Cash," blares reporter Art McGinn's headline in the *Sacramento Bee* on November 9, 1966.

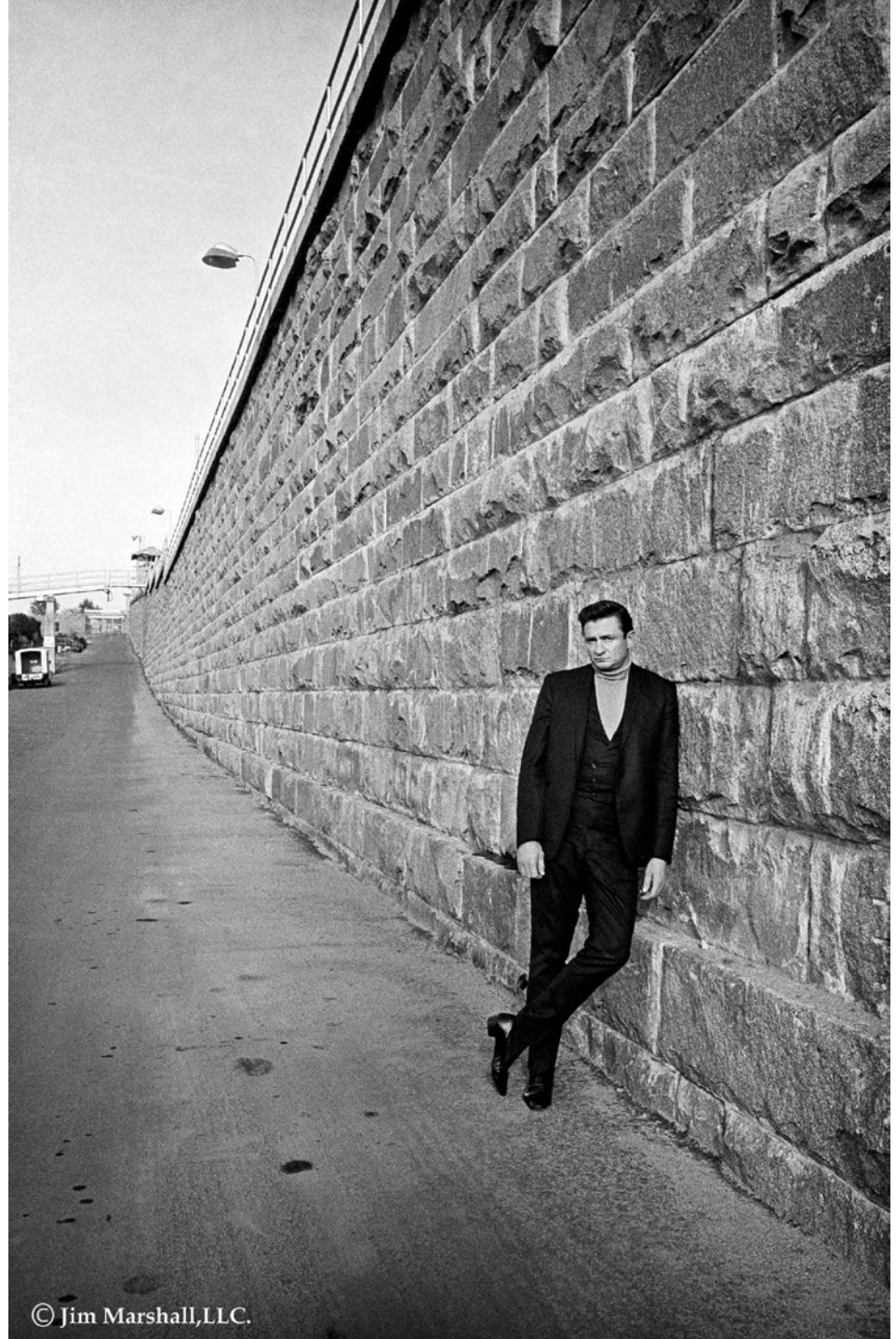
Additional photos of the 1966 concert taken by the *Sacramento Union*, now in the special collections at the University of California, Davis, some show the prison's historic religious facility in the background. The edifice was immortalized two years later as the last song on the *Folsom* album. "Greystone Chapel" was written by inmate Glen Sherley and quickly learned by Cash the day before, as he and his bandmates rehearsed at the Hotel El Rancho Resort in West Sacramento.

The excitement of the Folsom concert wasn't just for the inmates and the prison officials. During a rehearsal break at the El Rancho, Cash and the band were visited by then Governor Ronald Reagan. Reagan coincidentally won his election two years previous on the exact same day Cash was on the Folsom Prison yard in November of 1966.

Recording Challenges

Performing in a prison was one thing, but recording for an album was another, especially in the days before digital technology. Cash's idea of a live album at a prison was well out of the comfort zone for both the prison staff and the record companies in the late 1960s. This was especially difficult, as the two prisons of choice were at the highest security level, and the technical needs for recording were intricate and complex.

Cash had advocates who may have helped bring his idea to life. His personal pastor, the Reverend Floyd Gressett of Ventura, counselled death-row inmates in the early 1960s in San Quentin. Gressett was also close to Coach Lloyd Kelly, the Folsom prison recreation director. It was Gressett



Our cover photo for this issue is from the collection of rare photographs taken by rock-and-roll photographer Jim Marshall when Johnny Cash, his fiancé June Carter, and the band performed for the concert album in January 1968 in Folsom Prison. The estate of Jim Marshall donated fine prints of this image and over a dozen more to the California State Library in 2018.

(© 1968 Jim Marshall LLC)