

Sitting on Top of the World (Mississippi Sheiks once more)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 13 September 2012 16:25 - Last Updated Friday, 13 March 2015 15:58

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An' I don't worry 'Cause I'm sittin' on top of the world"

"Sitting on Top of the World" has become a standard of traditional American music. The song has been widely recorded in a variety of different styles – folk, blues, country, bluegrass, rock – often with considerable variations and/or additions to the original verses. The blues version was written by **Walter Vinson** and **Lonnie Chatmon**, core members of the Mississippi Sheiks.

Sitting on Top of the World

Walter Vinson claimed to have composed *"Sitting on Top of the World"* one morning after playing a white dance in Greenwood, Mississippi.



Walter Vinson

The Mississippi Sheiks recorded in a lot of configurations in the early 1930s, but usually with Lonnie Chatmon's fiddle front and center, along with the guitar and vocals of Walter Vinson, and

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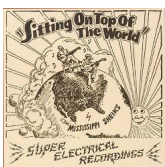
at different times Bo Carter, Sam Chatmon, Texas Alexander, and others (usually friends, family, or neighbors) would sit in, and it always came out sounding like the Sheiks, a ragged, loose street corner string band playing the blues.



Lonnie Chatmon & Walter Vinson

The title line of *"Sitting on Top of the World"* was probably borrowed from a well-known popular song of the 1920s, *"I'm Sitting on Top of the World"*, written by Ray Henderson, Sam Lewis and Joe Young (popularised by Al Jolson in 1926). However the two songs are distinct, both musically and lyrically (apart from the title).

The song was first recorded by the Mississippi Sheiks in 1930 on the Okeh label, became a popular cross-over hit for the band, and was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 2008.



Sitting on Top of the World, cover

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On the surface it seems to be about a broken heart, but a second glance at the song shows another picture. Written and recorded in 1930, near the height of the Great Depression, it is more likely that *"Sitting on Top of the World"* is about financial and social hardships. It's really difficult for me, someone living in a completely different time period and location, what life was like for African-Americans living in a pre-Civil Rights movement, Great Depression era deep south. All I know for sure is that life was not easy for most. That's probably why *"Sitting on Top of the World"* achieved great popularity, and was the best-selling blues record of 1930 - it offers a sense of stoic optimism in times of emotional distress and hardship.



Mississippi Sheiks

The numerous versions of *"Sitting Top of the World"* recorded since 1930 have been characterized by variations to the original lyrics. In May 1930

Charlie Patton

recorded a version of the song (with altered lyrics) called *"Some Summer Day"*.



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Sitting on Top of the World, cd

"Sittin' on Top of the World", recorded by Howlin' Wolf in 1957 (and published under his birth-name Chester Burnett), is a well-known and widely-used version of this song. This was the version recorded by Cream in 1968.

Several prominent artists have covered the song, including Bob Dylan, Cream, The Grateful Dead, B.B. King, Ray Charles, and John Lee Hooker.



Sitting on Top of the World

"Sitting on Top of the World", lyrics:

Version Mississippi Sheiks:

Worked all the summer, and all the fall, Just trying to find my little all in all. But now she's

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gone, I don't worry, I'm sitting on top of the world. Was in the spring, one summer day, Just when she left me, she's gone to stay. But now she's gone, I don't worry, I'm sitting on top of the world. Don't you come here runnin', holdin' up your hand, Can't get me a woman, quick as you get a man. But now she's gone, I don't worry, I'm sitting on top of the world. It have been days, I didn't know your name, Why should I worry and pray in vain. But now she's gone, I don't worry, I'm sitting on top of the world. Went to the station, down in the yard, Gonna get me a freight train, work done got hard. But now she's gone, I don't worry, I'm sitting on top of the world. The lonesome days, they have gone by, Why should you beg me and say goodbye. But now she's gone, I don't worry, I'm sitting on top of the world.



String Blues Band

Version Howlin' Wolf:

One summer day, she went away, She gone and left me, she gone to stay. But now she gone, and I don't worry. 'Cause I'm sitting on top of the world. Worked all the summer, and worked all the fall, I had to take my Christmas, in my overall. But now she gone, and I don't worry, Because I'm sitting on top of the world. Goin' down to the freight yard, just to meet a freight train, I'm gonna leave this town, well it's just got too hard. But now she gone, and I don't worry, Because I'm sitting on top of the world. One summer day, she went away, She gone and left me, she gone to stay. But now she gone, and I don't worry, 'Cause I'm sitting on top of the world.