

I Shot the Sheriff

(Bob Marley and the Wailers)

[Verse 1]

I shot the sheriff
But I didn't shoot no deputy, oh no! Oh!
I shot the sheriff
But I didn't shoot no deputy, ooh, ooh, oo-
ooh
Yeah! All around in my home town
They're trying to track me down
They say they want to bring me in guilty
For the killing of a deputy
For the life of a deputy
But I say

[Verse 2]

Oh, now, now. Oh!
(I shot the sheriff.) - the sheriff
(But I swear it was in self-defense.)
Oh, no! (Ooh, ooh, oo-oh) Yeah
I say: I shot the sheriff - Oh, Lord!
(And they say it is a capital offense.)
Yeah! (Ooh, ooh, oo-oh) Yeah!

[Verse 3]

Sheriff John Brown always hated me
For what, I don't know:
Every time I plant a seed
He said kill it before it grow
He said kill them before they grow
And so

[Verse 4]

Read it in the news
(I shot the sheriff.) Oh, Lord!
(But I swear it was in self-defense.)

Where was the deputy? (Oo-oo-oh)

I say: I shot the sheriff
But I swear it was in self-defense. (Oo-oh)
Yeah!

[Verse 5]

Freedom came my way one day
And I started out of town, yeah!
All of a sudden I saw sheriff John Brown
Aiming to shoot me down
So I shot - I shot - I shot him down and I say
If I am guilty I will pay

[Verse 6]

(I shot the sheriff.)
But I say (But I didn't shoot no deputy)
I didn't shoot no deputy (oh, no-oh), oh no!
(I shot the sheriff.) I did!
But I didn't shoot no deputy. Oh! (Oo-oo-
ooh)
Reflexes had got the better of me
And what is to be must be:
Every day the bucket a-go a well
One day the bottom a-go drop out
One day the bottom a-go drop out

I say:

I - I - I - I shot the sheriff
Lord, I didn't shot the deputy. Yeah!
I - I (shot the sheriff) -
But I didn't shoot no deputy, yeah! No,
yeah!

“I Shot the Sheriff” tells a story from the point of view of a narrator who admits to having killed the local sheriff, and claims to be falsely accused of having killed the deputy sheriff. The narrator also claims to have acted in self-defense when the sheriff tried to shoot him. The song was first released in 1973 on Bob Marley and the Wailers' album, *Burnin'*. Marley explained his intention as follows: "I want to say 'I shot the police' but the government would have made a fuss so I said 'I shot the sheriff' instead... but it's the same idea: justice."

In 1992, with the controversy surrounding the Ice-T song "Cop Killer", Marley's song was often cited by Ice-T's supporters as evidence of his detractors' hypocrisy considering the older song was never similarly criticized despite having much the same theme.

In 2012, Bob Marley's former girlfriend Esther Anderson claimed that the lyrics, "Sheriff John Brown always hated me, For what, I don't know: Every time I plant a seed, He said kill it before it grow" are actually about Marley being very opposed to her use of birth control pills; Marley supposedly substituted the word "doctor" with sheriff.

Eric Clapton recorded a cover version that was included on his 1974 album *461 Ocean Boulevard*. His take on the song belongs to the musical genres of soft rock and reggae. It is the most successful version of the song, peaking at number one on the *Billboard Hot 100*. In 2003, Clapton's version was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.