

B/W - West, Manley Dr.

B/W - Professor Manley West

# PROFESSOR MANLEY WEST: The man and his work

**By Neresa Lawrence-Reid**

*Cannabis sativa* otherwise called Ganja. Narcotic or drug? What benefit could that be to medicine?

One man has given answers to the above question. A Jamaican, dark, handsome, intelligent, educated, caring, sensitive, concerned. He is Manley West, Professor of Pharmacology, Faculty of Medical Sciences at the University of the West Indies.

Comfortably seated behind a large desk in his office, Professor West talked about his work and himself. Behind him are several shelves of books which seem well used. On his desk, standing directly in front of me, was a pair of hawk's talons, which I found particularly intriguing.

Manley West was born and raised in Portland, Jamaica. He attended Titchfield High School, the University of the West Indies and then the University of London. He is a qualified chemist and accountant apart from being a professional pharmacologist. His academic career includes:

1. Postgraduate work in cancer chemotherapy at Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research in New York, USA
2. Work in experimental open heart surgery
3. Post graduate research into how drugs cross the membrane of the eye - 1985, at the University of Cambridge on a British Council Fellowship under Professor Alan Cuthbert F.R.S.
4. Research in cancer-causing compounds - Yale University under Professor Handshumarker
5. Advanced toxicology at the Institute of Toxicology, University of Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

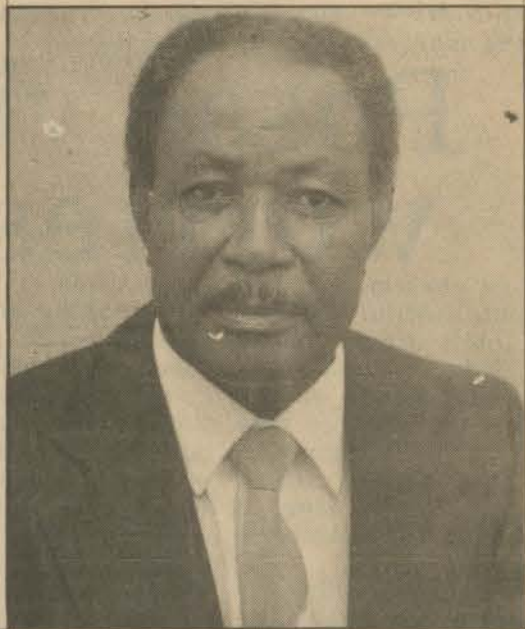
This is by no means an exhaustive list of fellowships.

## Canasol

Jamaican pharmacists best know Professor West for his development of Canasol® from *Cannabis sativa* to treat glaucoma.

In response to the question, what sparked his interest in Pharmacology and ganja in particular, Professor West explained that his interest in pharmacology was somehow always there, latent in him.

Reading about such scientists as Alexander Flemming (1945 Nobel Prize for discovery of Penicillin) and Frederick Banting and



**Dr Manley West**

Charles Best (who isolated and used insulin for the treatment of Diabetes Mellitus) was very inspirational. He developed an urge to contribute to Jamaican medicine, especially developing drugs originating in Jamaica and at the University of the West Indies in particular.

As to his interest in ganja, the professor relates it to one of his hobbies, fishing. From his association with local fishermen he observed that the men often drank rum steeped with ganja or smoked the plant. Their explanation was that it improved their vision in the dark so they did not need light. In fact, while fishing with them, he realised that the things the users could see, he with twenty twenty vision could not see! In fact, ophthalmologists report that Canasol eye drop improves patients' night vision.

The work on ganja was also encouraged by Dr Albert Lockhart, an ophthalmologist and co-partner in developing Canasol®. Dr Lockart had attended a conference in the United States where a paper was presented claiming that persons using ganja has lower intraocular pressure than non-users.

The work on Canasol® then began! It took ten years to develop the drug. The scientists received Canadian \$20,000.00 through a CIDA grant and the rest of the money they had to invest themselves. The Department of Pharmacology gave them total support especially Mr. Kenneth Brown, the Senior technologist. Professor West and his team carried out many tests and had to use suitable mechanisms to prevent bias.

His wife, Eugenie, a registered nurse, who works with him at the Department of Pharmacology, was the one who identified the sample which contained the hypotensive agent. So with a grant of Canadian \$20,000, these Jamaicans were able

to develop a drug, which in the United States could cost between thirty and thirty-five million dollars. Incredible!

But this drug was developed in a Third World or developing country! How can it break into the international market? Scientists and pharmacists all over the world know of Canasol's® existence but some have never seen it.

## Acquiring techniques

Professor West explains that multinational companies are more interested in acquiring his extraction techniques and research material than in buying the patent for the drug or distributing it internationally.

He is constantly bombarded with requests for his method of extraction, with persons even being offered fellowships to work with him and learn his procedures. It is claimed by some, that Canasol® lowers the intraocular pressure too rapidly and should be used with caution. But couldn't that be an advantage in ocular hypertensive crisis? Canasol® lowers the intraocular pressure by fifty percent in fifteen minutes.

It is presently undergoing efficacy tests at the prestigious Moorefield's Eye Hospital in London. Canasol® is distributed locally and in the Caribbean by Ampec Limited.

Another preparation developed from cannabis is Asmasol®. Amasol is a liquid preparation which acts as an expectorant and bronchodilator. Canivert® is new and a complex carbohydrate developed based on the knowledge of Canasol's development. Canivert is indicated for the control of Meniere's disease and vestibular disequilibrium.

Let us return to the man. Professor West is married with a family. One of them, a daughter is interested in medicine and hopes to specialise in pharmacology. During the long hours of research, his family has spent many hours of the night at the pharmacology lab! Children doing their homework while his wife and himself work.

For his work Professor Manley West has been awarded a Certificate of Merit in 1976 by the Canadian government. He received the Centenary Medal in Jamaica for 'Outstanding Contribution to Natural Sciences' in 1981 and in 1987, along with Dr. Lockhart was awarded the National Order of Merit for contribution to medicine (Canasol)®. The latter awarded permits him to use the title 'honourable'.

Professor West is also a farmer. He grows coconuts in Portland, and presently grows his own vegetables. He enjoys hunting and shooting birds and wild pigs for food during the "right" season. Teaching also gives him much pleasure and he enjoys good rapport with his students. All his interest seem to benefit the country - providing food, education and pharmaceuticals.

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***Manley West, a great Jamaican.  
We must be proud of him.***