V. RESEARCH NOTES

GETTING HIGH: GANJA MAN AND HIS SOCIO-ECONOMIC MILIEU

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This article will compare and contrast two kinds of religious groupings found in the lower class of Jamaica. We focus on the kinds of behavior and the degrees of participation related to the use of marijuana (cannabis sativa L.) of members of these groupings. The data for this article are taken from observations made during fieldwork in Jamaica from 1969 to 1972.

In the United States and abroad, public concern about the increasing use of "dangerous drugs," including marijuana, has generated a plethora of research on this subject from a variety of disciplines. Unfortunately, much of the research on marijuana has functioned to obscure rather than to clarify the relationship between the users and the wider society. It is not our purpose here to analyze the pros and cons of all research on marijuana. We do identify three major methodological and conceptual approaches which we postulate have thwarted a successful explanation of cannabis use within a societal framework. The fallacious approaches are:

1. an emphasis on the individual cannabis consumer, an emphasis which artificially separates the user from their socio-economic milieu and ignores sociological aspects of cannabis use;
2. a preoccupation with causality and consequences, thereby ignoring the element of process; and
3. a lack of comparative intra-cultural and cross-cultural data.

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In the forthcoming comparison we try to avoid the ethnocentric pitfall of treating cannabis in terms of a personal psychological experience that needs to be rationalized. Instead, we begin by accepting cannabis as a fact, a “given” of lower class Jamaican life rather than try to account for its existence altogether in terms of lower class culture, values or pathology.

Using an anthropological approach, which is traditionally holistic, deals with groups, gives consideration to social process, and is comparative, we view behavior related to cannabis in a sociological framework in order to confirm our hypothesis that such behavior is both reflective of and determined by the social and economic milieu of the user. The individual, his goals and attitudes, social position and options open to him, are all crucial factors which must be taken into account in order to explain the relationship between drugs and society.

From observations and local crime reports, we can tentatively state that the use of cannabis in Jamaica is widespread throughout the island. Users generally fall into the lower socio-economic stratum of the society. Prevalence of use is difficult to estimate; the only quoted figures are those in Jamaican newspaper articles, giving a range of 33% to 60% of the lower class population. The use, possession and selling of cannabis are illegal in Jamaica, carrying a penalty ranging from 12 months to 5 years of imprisonment, depending on the charge and the strength of the supporting evidence. As will become clear in the following discussion, ‘use’ of cannabis, or ‘ganja’ as it is commonly referred to in Jamaica, does not mean only the smoking of it, although smokers do constitute the largest body of users. Smokers and non-smokers brew tea from cannabis leaves and/or soak the leaves in overproof rum to make a medicinal tonic.

In considering cannabis-centered activities in Jamaica, we must deal with the options open to the individual, options which include or preclude cannabis use, the form such use may take, the purpose, the quantity used, with whom and in what settings. These various factors differ according to the socioeconomic milieu of the individual. The sanctions involved also differ according to the range and types of factors. We see that the tea or tonic drinker is not under the same pressures nor is she or he subject to the same negative public image as is the person who smokes and concomitantly drinks the tea and tonic.

The first grouping under consideration centers around a Rastafarian “yard” in the urban center of Kingston. The second grouping is a Pentecostal revivalist sect found in a rural mountain village.

In our several discussions, we have found significant points of similarity as well as of difference between these two groupings. Similarities include:

1. orientation of the members of the grouping, which is predominantly religious as opposed to economic or political;
2. structure, which is organizationally and functionally ego-centered with an identifiable core of close assistants plus loose-knit following;
3. class status of members which is generally that of the lowest socio-economic stratum;
4. widespread use of ganja (cannabis).

Differences include: urban vs. rural settings, female/male ratio, orientations of the groupings toward the wider society, and the use of religious ideology and the function of the belief system to justify the use of ganja.

The Urban Rastafarians

Before focusing on a specific Rasta grouping, let us explain briefly the Rastafarian Movement. Doctrinally, the Movement is millenial, as reflected in the two major tenets of the creed:

1. Africa, as Ethiopia, is the promised land, the past and future home of all black men and women; and
2. Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, is the Black Reincarnated Christ.

While the twin doctrine of repatriation, that is, back-to-Africa, and reincarnation is pristine in the minds of the majority of Rastas, the actual source of this millenial dream is anything but clear. Marcus Garvey is generally held to be the man who ignited the spark of the Movement’s ideology. It was Garvey who reputedly said: “Look to Africa where a Black King will be crowned. And he shall lead you out of bondage”—this immediately before His Majesty’s coronation in 1930. The term “Rastafari,” or “Crown Prince” in the Amharic language, stems from Haile Selassie’s title prior to his coronation as Emperor.

From the early 1930s to the present, the Rasta credo has gained in importance and in adherents throughout Jamaica. Although no precise enumeration of Rasta brethren can be taken, previous research indicates that more than 90% of those espousing the doctrine and following the several norms of behavior patterns belong to what some social scientists term as the “black social section” of Jamaican society. Their income levels may vary from just above to well below subsistence level. In general, they can be classified as semi-skilled or unskilled workers, subsistence farmers, casual day laborers. Their socio-economic status is reflected in the attitude they hold toward the larger society and vice versa. In direct contrast to the Pentecosta

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1 Our research was done prior to the 1974 coup which ousted the Emperor.
church member, the true Rasta, that is, one who regards repatriation with Ethiopia as his only salvation and who believes Haile Selassie to be the Reincarnated Black Christ, rejects Jamaica as Babylon, as the white man's world, and only awaits its apocalyptic fall. Conversely, the general public on the island alternately regards members of the Movement as delusionists, religious fanatics, depraved and dangerous criminals, or simply as embarrassing nuisances.

One of the more significant reasons for public hostility is the supposed widespread use of ganja among Rastafarians. While not all Rastas smoke or drink cannabis, for that indeterminate number who do use it, there is an explicit ideological support found in the belief system. That support is in the form of repeated Old Testament references to "the herb." Brethren interpret the biblical "herb" as the local form of cannabis. Such ideological support is contrary to the tenets of the Pentecostal sect, as will be explained. For the Rasta, smoking ganja is a means of meditation, of gaining self-and world-understanding, and of communion with God. Drinking ganja tea is for medicinal treatment of a wide variety of ailments, e.g., fever, asthma, colds, stomach pains.

The Rastas with whom Rogers worked during the field research are part of a large but fluctuating number of people who congregate around one man. That man is Brother Moses (pseudonym). He is the Ego of an amorphous collection of people who depend upon one individual for their definition as a grouping. Structural characteristics of the grouping around Moses include a loose collection of people, with a very limited degree of organization, ego-centered in the sense that this collection depends on Moses for its existence, and within which group interaction is predominantly between Moses and the members. Actions between members and not specifically channeled through Moses normally center around the use of ganja.

The majority of individuals within Moses' following are men. There is a noticeable dearth of women for the reason that women play a secondary role in the decision-making process and activities of the Rasta Movement in general and of this grouping in particular. Individuals vary in age from teen-agers to people in their mid-60s with an identifiable clustering in the 30-to-45 age category. The grouping is urban in location rather than rural as is the case with the Pentecostal sect. Also unlike the Pentecostals, these Rasta brethren have no land. They generally "hustle" or "scuffle" for a living. This means that their primary ties with ganja are those of distribution and consumer use, but not one of production.

As with every other trait ascribed to the Rastafarians, the use of ganja varies according to the grouping and to the individuals within that grouping. For the majority of brethren around Moses, the use of ganja is especially heavy. During fieldwork, Rogers daily spent time in Moses' yard and never observed a lack of cannabis. While the use of ganja may be heavy in terms of the consumption of the entire group, there is no maximum of minimum amount dictated. The individual
decides how much to smoke, when, where, and in what form. Such a decision is affected by several factors: cost and the amount of cash or credit he has; the number of brothers in the yard at any one time, brothers who smoke and “ground good” together; the individuals’ motivation to indulge or abstain.

Methods of ingestion include drinking the tea and smoking either cigar (spliff) or pipe. Cigar-smoking is more common because it requires less ganja, is thereby cheaper and can be carried more easily, thus allowing the person to smoke when and where he pleases. The pipe is the more potent in terms of smoke inhaled and the more costly in terms of the amount of ganja required. The kind of pipe normally used is a large, home-constructed water-pipe with a rubber tubing of about a foot in length which serves as the stem. The cost of smoking a pipe is alleviated a good deal as no one person smokes it alone; pipe smoking is very much a social practice. According to one informant, as many as 17 brothers have smoked one pipe (fully packed) together. Usually, the number ranges between 3 and 7 men, depending on the degree of camaraderie of those in the yard or meeting house at the same time, the supply of cannabis, and the financial position of those present. A few brothers may “buy a pipe” and, after preparing the ganja to be smoked, offer the pipe to a new arrival.

Reasons cited for smoking ganja vary according to the speaker, how much ganja he has smoked immediately before the question of “why” is posed, his own feeling or mood on the occasion, and the number of smokers vs. non-smokers present at the time. The more positive the surroundings vis-à-vis the speaker, i.e., with several smokers present and in a place known and frequented by Rastas who smoke cannabis, the less defensive and more vague the reasons given. Conversely, the more negative the surroundings, i.e., with a majority of those present known to be non-smokers and/or in a location not frequented by Rastas, the more defensive and the more precise the individual becomes in his apologia.

The brethren of Moses’ grouping consistently maintain that ganja is better than alcohol as it doesn’t leave a hangover and doesn’t make you “loose your head” and get into fights; it can be a substitute for food because it takes your mind off eating; ganja is good medicine in tea; taken during the day ganja helps you get up your courage to face a particularly hard job; taken at night, it eases your mind after a trying day, especially when the smoking is accompanied by music and drums. The only negative thing about ganja is the police—if they catch you.

No matter the specific reasons cited, the beneficial aspects of ganja-smoking are always emphasized to the virtual exclusion of any harmful considerations. Rogers was repeatedly chided for smoking tobacco cigarettes which cause lung cancer when he could have smoked ganja which has only good effects on both mind and body. When the leading daily newspaper printed an article concerning the deleterious results of smoking cannabis, one 26-year old brother who had smoked ganja at least twice daily since he was 10 years old, exclaimed proudly that he was living proof that the
allegations of the article were completely false. On yet another occasion when an article in the same newspaper proclaimed ganja to be poisonous to the system, four Rasta brothers, all regular users, discussed this “poison charge” among themselves for a few minutes. They finally decided that they knew better than the printed account and could possibly help the reporter “come to the full understandin’” about ganja by showing him how to “smoke it good.”

As may be apparent, the use of ganja in this particular grouping of Rastafarians has several aspects. Economically, the distribution or sale of cannabis serves as one important means of income for Brother Moses and for those along his supply line. Socially, as one of the largest distributors of ganja in the area, Moses also uses cannabis as a means of reinforcing old ties with a wide variety of people, especially Rastas, and of establishing new ties. Indeed, Moses’ customers range from fellow Rastas, non-Rasta slum dwellers to members of the middle class government officialdom and the university faculty. It is most probable that for more individuals than Rogers knows of, all roads eventually lead to Moses’ yard. Politically, the sale and smoking of ganja are still another way in which the Rasta brethren flout the authority of the babylonian Jamaican society in accordance with the ideological corollary mentioned earlier.

The ritual aspect of ganja use is the least surprising in view of the ideological supports found in the Rasta credo. Those who smoke ganja regard it as “the wisdom weed,” the “herb” in the Old Testament reference to King Solomon’s grave. Many Rastas in Moses’ grouping hold that smoking cannabis is the only way to gain knowledge and understanding of the world because educational opportunities are limited for members of the lower class. The use of “the wisdom weed” is both social and ritualized to the extent that it is normally smoked in a group and that one of two patterns emerges whenever individuals smoke together:

1. the brethren begin to discuss immediately “things Rasta,” e.g., repatriation to Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, Babylon; or
2. they “cogitate” for awhile before conversing about Jamaican social problems.

For Moses et al., ‘discussions’ are not merely conversations while seated or standing in one place. The brethren may be very active while “getting high” and “grounding.” They may beat on the akete drums, give themselves Ahmaric lessons on the blackboard,

2 While this statement may appear to contradict what was stated in the Introduction about smoking as a lower class activity, we emphasize that the largest number of persons who smoke or use ganja in any way are still to be found in the lowest socio-economic stratum. Only a very small percentage of university affiliated persons and members of the middle class have accepted cannabis to the point of smoking it.
read ‘relevant’ passages from books, newspapers, or magazines, or listen to the radio or a tape of one of Moses’ discourses. These activities are carried out whether some of the brothers are gathered at Moses’ yard or at their meeting house in another part of West Kingston. The goal of such activities is primarily to gain wisdom—from ganja and from one another. Such ritualized behavior also serves to reinforce ties of the individuals with the grouping and with the wider Movement. Ganja-smoking qua Rastafarian activity reaffirms their Rasta-ness to themselves and, indirectly, to the rest of society.

The Rural Pentecostals

The second grouping under consideration is a Pentecostal sect located in a rural settlement hereafter referred to as “Riverview.” This settlement lies in the Blue Mountain foothills, less than twenty miles from Kingston, the capital. Riverview’s population of approximately seven hundred souls—mostly children—is accommodated in 153 households. In this village small farming is the major economic activity and individual land ownership is the norm. Most of the flat, arable land, however, is controlled by a few wealthy and middle class farmers and a tobacco company which contracts twelve local men as tobacco growers. The majority of the Riverview residents depend for a livelihood on land tracts which are of poor quality and widely dispersed. Combining this factor of unequal land distribution with frequent droughts, erosive soil and an ever increasing population, it is easy to see that community life is often marked by economic depression and concomitant stiff competition for its limited resources. The absence of viable land room or other employment opportunities of any consequence has resulted in a constant migration of Riverview young people to Kingston.

As there is a multiplex relationship between ganja, sect, and village life in general, we will first give some background on the status of ganja in Riverview. Of the 179 males over the age of fifteen,3 who represent most of the possible ganja smokers, at least 110 are known to have smoked to some degree. Forty-four can be categorized as heavy users; known locally as ganja men, these men have established reputations for smoking daily as long as the herb can be obtained. The remaining 66 smokers fall into various categories, e.g., “occasional” or “seldom;” these are usually men who smoked in their younger days but have largely given it up.

In Riverview, it is possible for residents to cultivate as well as to use ganja. As far

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3 Ganja smoking among females and boys under fifteen is so negligible and sporadic at present that it is not dealt with here. Although there are some indications that this pattern is changing, regular ganja smoking is essentially an adult male activity.
as Dreher could determine, out of 153 households, at least 39 cultivate cannabis in some quantity. Of these 39 households 22 cultivate the plant solely for personal household consumption while the remaining 17 grow it for sale. There is some debate among Riverview residents as to who is actually making money from ganja cultivation. Members of the small middle class insist that the lower classes are simply too lazy and won’t work to make an “honest” living; that they prefer to “walk up and down selling ganja so they can smoke all day and not work.” Lower class individuals contend the opposite; that it is the middle class that is making all the real money in the ganja trade. The latter can cultivate on a larger scale and has the resources to pay off the police and various officials, thus minimizing the risks and maximizing the returns.

All the seventeen Riverview men who are known to cultivate ganja for sale are from the lowest socio-economic class. For a variety of reasons, ganja cultivation is often a poor man’s enterprise. Although a lower class farmer may own the land which he tills, the quality of that land is usually very poor. It is mountainous and thereby unsuited for machinery; it is subject to unpredictable soil and weather conditions; it is remote and not readily accessible, presenting difficulties in transporting crops to market, difficulties which are augmented if the crops are perishable. Even if the small cultivator manages to overcome these obstacles, he still faces an unstable market in which he may be forced to sell his produce for a poor profit.

All these factors combine to push the lower class farmer into ganja cultivation which, for him, has several advantages over food crop cultivation. Ganja must necessarily be planted on land which is remote and difficult to get to, land unsuited to growing food. After the first six months, cannabis grows as it is named, like a “weed,” needing little care. Once reaped, it can be left to cure in the same place and then be brought down in small quantities to sell or sold off right in the bush. Whereas food must be sold off at once before spoilage, thereby lumping profits into one sum, ganja can be cured, stored, and parcelled for sale a little at a time. For lower-class households, the sale of cannabis is an important source of day to day income. Finally, the market for ganja is amazingly stable in this area of Jamaica; it seldom reaches below twenty dollars per pound, two dollars per ounce, and twenty cents per stick. In Riverview, the primary requisite of ganja cultivation—land which is remote and unaccessible—is at once the very factor which operates to push individuals into ganja cultivation as a means of making a living.

Completing the triangle of multiplex relationships between ganja, village life and Pentecostal sect, we will now briefly describe some of the characteristics of this particular sect. St. Peters Pentecostal (pseudonym) is one of five churches in Riverview. It subscribes to a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible and a hellfire and brimstone order of preaching. This sect also emphasizes the power of its leader to manipulate good and evil spirits and to heal the sick with bush medicines and the laying on of hands. Church brethren are expected to be model Christians and live quiet and decent
lives dedicated to the service of the church and their Pastor, observing the sect’s restrictions which include drinking of rum, smoking, social dancing, and fornication.

Followers of St. Peters Pentecostal can be divided into the two categories of “members” and “visitors.” Members are those persons officially baptized into the church, who observe the church injunctions, attend services regularly and maintain a close and constant relationship with their Pastor. “Visitors” are self-proclaimed followers of the church and may attend services regularly but are not officially baptized into the church and do not necessarily observe the church injunctions.

Similar to the Rastafarian brethren of Moses’ yard, the followers of this sect are drawn entirely from the lowest socio-economic stratum of the community—the same stratum of Riverview from which the heaviest ganja users and cultivators are drawn. In fact, when asked their religious affiliation, all 44 ganja-men in Riverview including the 17 who cultivate ganja for sale claimed St. Peters as the church which they attended. Of the 39 households which cultivate ganja for any purposes; 28 include at least one adult person who is a member of St. Peters Pentecostal.

Unlike the Rastas, women constitute the foundation of sect membership; only 3 men besides the leader are active in the church while over 30 female members are committed to church affairs and service to their leader. All of these church sisters are wives and/or mothers who may also work outside the home in low paying, unskilled jobs such as domestics, small scale higglerers, or day laborers for middle class farmers or the tobacco company. All are residents of Riverview and indeed are actually the wives, mothers, and sisters of the ganja smokers and cultivators of the village.

Like Moses’ sect, the church is largely organized around the activities and doctrinal interpretations of its leader, Pastor Morgan (pseudonym). It is Pastor Morgan’s reputed divine gift of the power to heal that first established the church. In fact, many villagers do not even know the real name of the church and refer to it simply as “Pastor’s Church.” Pastor Morgan fulfills a triple role of Pentecostal minister, faith healer, and practitioner of magic—known in Jamaica as “science.” The genius of this man is his ability to cleverly juxtaopose his three different roles as minister, healer and Science Man to his own advantage as well as to that of his followers. Through his exposure to Kingstonian businessmen, politicians, and bureaucrats in his Science Man practice, Pastor Morgan establishes liaisons which are useful in providing his lower class church followers with resources to jobs, money, prestige and various political favors.

Pastor Morgan is extremely ambitious and features himself as another Oral Roberts or Billy Graham. In order to achieve this ambition Pastor recognizes that he must lift the status of his church and its members in relation to the rest of society. Pentecostal and other revivalist sects are traditionally regarded with condescension as an institution of the lower classes. Consequently, it is very important to this leader that he promote the respectability of his flock by encouraging the imitation of middle class manners and the avoidance of trouble with the law. He lectures and demands
behavior appropriate to middle class Jamaica, including everything from proper dress, speech and table manners to the avoidance of drinking rum and smoking ganja. He pressures members to become legally married, limit the size of their families, open savings accounts, and not to “brawl” and “curse.” He also procures jobs, loans and favors for church members through his contacts with the wealthier, more influential people that form his “Science Man” clientele. This is obviously a very different relationship to society than Moses’ group espouses. The religious congregation which Pastor leads is not one which emphasizes withdrawal from or even antagonism to the existing society; rather it is an alternative channel to gaining access to the privileges and goods of the middle and upper classes for himself and his followers. Pastor Morgan does not reject the “establishment” or “status quo,” nor does he have a particular desire to change it; he simply wants his share of it.

Pastor’s quest for respectability and a middle class motif has particular relevance for the role which ganja plays in this group. Cannabis use is as widespread among followers of this religious sect as it is throughout the Rastafarian group. It takes a very different, essentially less visible form, however, and this form fits in with the status and aspirations of the members and leader of the sect vis-a-vis the rest of Jamaican society. First of all, ganja is not a focus of sect activities as it is in many Rastafarian groups. The high incidence of ganja users as well as cultivators among the church followers is largely a coincidence of two lower class phenomena—that is, ganja and Pentecostalism—and it is not incorporated into Pentecostal ritual or doctrine, as with Rastafarian prayer, pageantry and ideology. In fact, the only way that ganja might be considered to be incorporated into sect doctrine is in the negative sense, that is, the injunction against the smoking of anything, ganja included. The evil of smoking “weed” is a theme of many of Pastor Morgan’s sermons with emphasis on the laziness, lack of productivity, possibility of madness, and danger of trouble with police as supposed consequences of smoking ganja. Pastor also claims that, far from seeing wisdom and truth, smoking ganja causes one to see “terrible things” including the evilest of spirits. He charges that a regime of smoking the herb is engaged in by initiate black hearted Obeah Men (black magic practitioners) in order to communicate with the devil first hand. Consequently, church members do not smoke ganja at all.

On the other hand, the efficacy of bush medicine is very much integrated into church activities and these same persons, who do not SMOKE ganja, consume ganja tea and medicines regularly and believe strongly in their preventive and curative properties. The folk explanation given for the difference in effect from the two modes of ingestion is that while ganja tea and medicine are absorbed into the blood stream making the blood strong and able to fight off disease, ganja inhaled goes straight to the brain and can “mad you” or “turn you criminal.”

Unlike the Rasta yard where smoking of the chillum pipe is a communal activity, the Pentecostals are very careful to hide their ganja even from each other and to use it
only in the privacy of their own homes. Many women brew ganja tea for their families regularly, disguising it with mint so that even their own husbands and children do not realize that they are ingesting the herb. Bottles of ganja medicine are hidden carefully so that visiting neighbors and even church brethren may not see them. Pastor Morgan himself is more secretive about ganja use than any other aspect of his practice. Even though he draws a cup of ganja tea each evening and recommends ganja medicine to clients with various health problems, he will not run the risk of growing or procuring ganja from anyone in the village who knows him and could lead him into trouble with the police. Church followers in general express a strong desire to avoid anti-social or trouble-making situations that might bring them into contact with legal authorities and damage their potential for socio-economic achievement. Though church members are regular consumers of ganja teas they will avoid activities such as ganja smoking. The non-member followers of the church who do smoke ganja also exercise conservatism in their ganja behavior when compared with the Rastafarians. They smoke in a secluded place in small groups of two or three, composed of life-long friends and neighbors. They never use a pipe because it looks "brawling and ugly" but prefer to light a spliff instead. The addition of drums and music to the procedure would be unthinkable as it would draw attention to them. The conversations during such "smokes" are usually mundane, focusing on a recent incident in the village or whether carrots or turnips proved to be a better crop this year, rather than the philosophical dialogue that accompanies ganja smoking in the Rasta yard.

The Pentecostal injunction against ganja smoking has a related function for sect members in that it helps to release individuals, particularly men, from the pressures to conform to behavior that has serious social, economic, and legal implications, for example, the stigma and legal penalty attached to being a ganja man. Men who are trying to make the climb toward middle class status, such as those men who are and have been members of Pastor Morgan’s church, have a particularly difficult time trying to balance their future objectives with their past associations and obligations. If a man was once a regular smoker and has decided to give it up, he must figure some way of refusing to smoke without offending his friends when they offer him a draw. Once he is designated as a "Christian" or Pentecostal "member," the individual is provided with an acceptable means of separating himself from the ganja smoking aspects of friendship without being considered a coward or "too proud" or an object of suspicion.

There is another aspect to the relationship of ganja, sect and community; as already discussed, for lack of a more efficient means of making a living, lower class farmers, many of them church followers, are forced into the marginal position of supplying an already well established ganja market. Once such an individual becomes a ganja cultivator he discovers that many of the advantages of cultivating ganja for sale become disadvantages. His ganja is planted on land that is remote and not easily
guarded and the desperate competition among cultivators in a similar plight is expressed in praedial larceny on a grand scale. Even if he could identify the thief, the ganja cultivator has no recourse to the conventional law enforcement system to protect his interests. Such a man is left to his own resources to safeguard his herbs and often simply has to swallow the loss. Pastor Morgan, however, has come to serve a regulatory function in local ganja enterprises. An incident which illustrates that function is the story of a man called Dada (pseudonym), who discovered that a large quantity of ganja that he had cut and left out for curing was stolen. After determining the thief through inquiry of other villagers, he brought his complaint to Pastor Morgan. The latter did not promise to retrieve the ganja but instructed Dada in the necessary steps to punish the thief. Dada posted a psalm elaborated with magical symbols—written in dove blood on parchment—to a pear tree near the place where the ganja was stolen. A few days later the wife of the man who had stolen the ganja came to Dada with the half cured weed, begging forgiveness and asking him to remove the curse. Dada assumed that the man had seen the piece of parchment and recognized its significance. In reality, the wife of the thief was a member of the Pentecostal sect. Pastor Morgan had called her in, lectured her on the evils of theft; and told her to return the ganja before serious misfortune befell her and her husband.

Pastor also has been known to assist church followers who have been arrested on a ganja offense. A lower class individual cannot usually afford the services of a lawyer much less the cost of paying policemen to give confusing and conflicting evidence. He, therefore, appeals to Pastor Morgan, who is particularly effective because so many police and low government officials are his clients and he can use these contacts for special favors. He also has the financial resources to pay police and hire lawyers, if necessary.

From the foregoing it is obvious that there is a complex relationship between sect members, their social and economic status and associations, and their patterns of cannabis use. On one hand, ganja smoking is incompatible with the goals of Pastor Morgan—respectability and a middle class standing. As such, smoking is negatively sanctioned in sect doctrine and receives additional discouragement in the Pastor’s preaching and counseling. In turn this injunction against smoking is particularly functional for sect members in allowing them to imitate middle class behavior without criticism from their peers. It is therefore in keeping with the goals of the sect as an organization as well as with those of individual members. On the other hand, a large number of members are from households which must rely on ganja cultivation for financial support and turn to Pastor to protect and regulate this enterprise. Although the church functions independently of ganja operations, its minister provides a vital service to the families of church members which must depend on ganja cultivation for a livelihood. At the same time, the sect supports the use of ganja teas and tonics for their purported medicinal properties. These drinks are consumed regularly by both
members and leaders. It is not the ganja itself that is considered “bad” but the mode of ingestion—consumption of the tea in the privacy of one’s home being more in line with the desired lifestyles of these Pentecostals than smoking in company and risking trouble with the law or being stigmatized as a Ganja Man.

Comparing the attitudes and behavior of Rastas and Pentecostals with regard to ganja helps to reaffirm our premises that patterns of ganja use vary and that these variations are dependent on the social and economic pressures and options experienced by the individual ganja consumer rather than on the pharmacology of the drug itself. Furthermore, in presenting these two religious sub-groups—both lower class, both with a high incidence of ganja users—we have seen that one group, the Rastafarians, is regarded as anti-establishment, rebellious, lazy, even criminal, while members of the other, the Pentecostals, are considered industrious, law-abiding, and well-integrated into the values of the wider society. These differences in behavior cannot be blamed on the Rastas’ extensive use of ganja as police and government officials would have us believe. This comparison must also help us to reject purely cultural interpretations that see ganja use as part and parcel of lower class culture in Jamaica and explain it as a tradition of the Jamaican lower classes. Here we have seen wide variation within the same ethnic and class group.

Individuals who aspire to middle class status and economic security are anxious to conceal if not eliminate their ganja-related activities. In contrast, those persons within the Rastafarian movement profess rejection of the Jamaican social system, seek to establish a different ideology and make little effort to hide their ganja-oriented behavior.

This marked dichotomy in attitude and aspirations indicated that there is no single explanation for behavior centering on cannabis usage. The individual user makes choices according to the nature of his social and economic status, the behavior of friends, relatives and sect or yard associates, and how he perceives his most viable options.