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He Started at UVI With a Degree in Biology, Now St. Croix Native Dr. Ralph Hazlewood is an Executive at a Company With Authorization to Provide Covid-19 Antibody Treatment

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Ernice Gilbert **December 07, 2020**

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Dr. Ralph Hazlewood.

The U.S. Virgin Islands continues to produce excellence in a multitude of fields. From Rashida Hodge, the VP of North America Global Markets at IBM, who was [recently named](#) one of Fortune Magazine's 40 Under 40 in Technology, to Marcella Nunez-Smith, an associate professor of internal medicine, public health and management, and founding director of the Equity Research and Innovation Center at Yale, [who has been named](#) co-chair of President-Elect Joe Biden's Covid-19 task force.

Another star has emerged shining bright for the territory: Dr. Ralph Hazlewood II, who started out at the University of the Virgin Islands, continued his studies at prestigious higher learning institutions on the mainland and is now a manager at Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, which the Food and Drug Administration has granted an emergency-use authorization for the company's Covid-19 antibody treatment, called REGN-COV2.

Dr. Hazlewood graduated from UVI as one of the few Black males with a degree in biology. With a passion for genetic research, he was awarded one of only three slots for a highly competitive human genetics fellowship at the McDonnell Genome Institute at Washington University in St. Louis. From there, he was accepted to pursue his doctorate at several schools including Yale.

Dr. Hazlewood ultimately chose to attend and receive his PhD from the University of Iowa where he studied the human molecular genetics of blindness. The 36-year-old received numerous awards for his work including securing several prestigious fellowships and awards to Harvard University and the National Institutes of Health, among others. Dr. Hazlewood went on to Vanderbilt as a postdoctoral fellow where he made significant discoveries to repurpose existing FDA approved drugs to treat and/or prevent glaucoma. He travels nationally and internationally to present this research.

His experiences and expertise led to his current position as manager at Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, which in November was granted FDA approval to provide its antibody Covid-19 treatment to Americans. According to CEO Dr. Leonard Schleifer, Regeneron [will provide the U.S. with 300,000 doses](#) of its newly authorized Covid-19 antibody treatment by early January. Thereafter, the company will provide 100,000 doses a month.



Dr. Ralph Hazlewood.

The Consortium sought and received comments from Dr. Hazlewood over the weekend. These responses are his and do not represent or propose to represent Regeneron Pharmaceuticals or affiliates.

What has kept you going?

I grew up with the love and support of strong parents, including the strongest person I've ever met. My mom, Marion Hazlewood, sacrificed so much to make it her mission to provide me with opportunities to explore my interests and foster a culture of scholarship. As the last of 8 children, I also benefited from having very strong sisters and brothers who early on helped me recognize that the world was so much bigger than Mon Bijou and St. Croix. Unfortunately, while in graduate school my mom passed away. Although losing my mom had been an exceptionally difficult time, the experience renewed my motivation to complete my PhD for her and my commitment to improve health care options through research.

How does it feel to have accomplished so much?

Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to be recognized for my scholarship and research with numerous awards. My greatest motivation was to make my mom proud and still to this day I strive to continue making her proud. As a Black scientist, I'm not immune to experiencing imposter syndrome, the feeling that you're not supposed to be at that institution, or maybe you're really not smart enough and someday "they" will figure it out. I've learned that I can withstand pain, grief, and even failure and still remain motivated and focused. I remember going to the doctor as a child, seeing all the awards and degrees on the wall and wishing one day that I can have that. Now looking at my wall of accomplishments in my office at home, I'm proud of how far I've come, the person I've become and that I'm able to share my lessons learned with the next generation.

What's been your experience with Covid-19 in the medical field?

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned the whole world upside down. With the deteriorating perceptions of the research community in the media over the last few years, the pandemic has also provided an opportunity to show just how important biological research is to society. Although not directly involved in COVID-19 research, for the past 9 months I've been fortunate to be in a position to work from home and spend quality time with my family, all while doing what I love to support laboratory research to find treatments for blinding diseases. It's given me a greater appreciation for the healthcare providers and other essential workers who put their lives at risk every day.

Any nuggets of success for young Virgin Islanders?

In college, I once had a professor that told me I would never become a scientist or succeed in science because of the way I dressed and because I had cornrows. I almost gave up on science after this course, but I've been fortunate to have great mentors. My advice to young Virgin Islanders is the same advice I received. Don't be afraid of your greatness or to chase your dreams. To borrow from wise words of Frederick Douglass, "Without struggle, there is no progress." Celebrate the small victories as well as the big ones. It will not come easy, but everything that is worth having, is worth the work you put into it. Find great mentors that believe in you and can help you build.

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