RETURNING to the U.S. scene at the beginning of the 1960's brings us to interesting "ifs." The Narcotics Bureau had silenced most of its critics. Questions raised by the joint ABA-AMA Committee had been drowned out by the Treasury response; there was not even much likelihood that its work would be published. Participants in the 1958 NIH Symposium had been intimidated, and it seemed unlikely that that proceeding would ever blossom into a printed record either. The AMA had softened its stand so much it almost seemed to be parroting the Bureau. And nothing of significance was happening in Congress to challenge Mr. Anslinger's supremacy or question his cherished views.

So if John Kennedy had not won in 1960-and more narrowly, if Governor Brown of California had not given him crucial support in the California primary, the Democratic convention, and the ensuing campaign in Mr. Nixon's own home state—there might have been little to add to the story we have unfolded to this point. Anslinger was virtually without problems as the Eisenhower regime ended, and by all auguries he should have remained in control of his quiet tyranny for at least the best part of another decade. Instead he was unthroned somewhat brusquely in 1962, and his Bureau itself survived only a few more years. Ironically, his nemesis was the very phenomenon which had made him so powerful for so many years—the irresistible attractiveness of drug issues to politicians when they find themselves shy of better things to talk about.

In this instance the shy politician was former Senator William Knowland, who had returned to California in 1958 to run against Pat Brown for governor. Brown had served as Attorney General for the preceding eight years, during which period California had made some enlightened reforms, including re-evaluation of her narcotic-drug policies, liberalization of her handling of youthful offenders, development of treatment programs, and extension of the use of parole to avoid merely incarcerating addict offenders for long terms of "straight" time. So Knowland took out after Brown with the charge that he had been "soft" on drug offenders and wanted to "coddle" dope fiends. A California legislative committee got into the act with hearings on the desirability of higher penalties and tougher enforcement policies, and Brown's running mate for the post of Attorney General Judge Stanley Mosk, opened a crossfire at Knowland by characterizing narcotics as only one root of a great California crime wave and urging an investigation of the whole crime pattern in the state.
The Brown-Mosk ticket won, but the campaign had aroused the local citizenry. California Elks canvassed for two million signatures on petitions calling for minimum sentences of thirty years for all drug offenses, with no parole or probation. It was discovered, as usual, that drug addiction had suddenly started making great inroads into the ranks of schoolchildren, and lawmakers in Sacramento stumbled over one another in the rush to announce harsh proposals. In 1959 Governor Brown sought to calm the situation by ordering a factual study by the California Board of Corrections, which reported moderately that the problem was growing in a steady and disquieting, way, stressed that drug abuse was too complex to be solved merely by further increases in criminal penalties, and recommended most strongly that marijuana be differentiated from true narcotics and that marijuana offenses be dropped to the misdemeanor level.

The Board found, moreover, that-excluding Los Angeles County-there had been no significant changes either up or down in drug-arrest rates over the preceding decade for the rest of the state, and it noted that there were virtually no 'major perpetrators of the narcotics traffic' among all the thousands of inmates serving time in California prisons for drug offenses (muffling the implications of the last point slightly by suggesting that doubtless the federal government had mopped up all the big-time smugglers and peddlers, so one would have to look for them in federal institutions).

But though the Board's study thus illuminated some of the realities in the situation, even it touched off new controversies and helped keep the drug issue in public view on the West Coast. In the 1960 elections, California campaign oratory again rang with challenges, promises, and high-pitched alarms. Attorney General Mosk called for a sweeping new investigation of narcotic drugs on a national scale, and this was picked up by the California delegation in Congress, where several resolutions were introduced calling for the convocation of a White House Conference on the subject. These proposals were in turn played up in home constituencies when their congressional sponsors went out campaigning. Governor Brown was not himself a candidate in 1960 but, as already noted, he played such a key role in helping the Kennedys capture the nomination, and then in almost winning the state away from Nixon, that he had unusually strong claims on the victor. He was offered a major administration post, but turned it down.

The Governor and other Californians reportedly had sought to commit Kennedy to the proposed White House Conference during his campaign, but had been met with indifference on the ground that drug addiction was not then a matter of great national interest. Even after the new regime was installed in Washington, both the President and his brother at the Justice Department remained notably cool toward the suggestion. One reason was certainly that Commissioner Anslinger, and hence his strong band of supporters in Congress, violently opposed it; Anslinger was content-and wisely so, as hindsight indicates-to ride along quietly with a minimum of attention from the New Frontiersmen. Another reason was that Kennedy family strategists were concentrating on building the image of the Attorney General as a fearless crime fighter, basing, of course, in the justice Department, and it would have been inconsistent with this aim to use the White House to give any big play to the Narcotics Bureau in Treasury. Administration
spokesmen openly registered their opposition to the various White House Conference proposals pending in Congress.

Governor Brown, however, was under no disability with regard to keeping things stirred up in his own state, and this he did by announcing that 1961 was going to be "Fight Narcotics Year" for his administration in Sacramento. Furthermore, at this point the Brown forces sounded a tiny new note that was soon to become a roar: the Governor announced his support for a new drive to curb abuses of amphetamines and other "dangerous drugs" outside the traditional narcotics categories. The phrase "dangerous drugs" had been in use for decades, in the British Act, at the Food and Drug Administration to refer to any substance requiring protective controls, and at the Narcotics Bureau to designate all drugs capable of injurious abuse. It was probably Commissioner Larrick of FDA who first began to get serious attention from the popular press by talking about the menace of amphetamines when used by truck drivers to keep themselves awake on long hauls.

Even so, it is a virtual certainty that the White House Conference proposals would still have died of neglect had it not been for another political happenstance, namely, that President Kennedy's arch-rival, Richard Nixon, challenged the President's great friend Pat Brown in the 1962 California gubernatorial race. Moreover, Nixon chose to reopen the old lines of attack on Governor Brown as being soft-hearted in meting out retribution against dope peddlers (who were, of course, undermining California in particular and America in general, and who were, not unexpectedly, discovered once again to be decimating the ranks of youth). The Kennedys' response was all-out. The President endorsed Brown's candidacy and made several appearances on his behalf. And the Attorney General let it be known, in response to trial balloons floated by non-Californians like Mayor Wagner of New York, that the administration might now look with more favor on a White House Conference.

The White House began issuing messages acknowledging the new menace of "dangerous drugs," and in May 1962 the President himself revealed, in connection with a glowing tribute to Governor Brown for progressive leadership in dealing with addicts, that he now leaned toward the idea of a national convocation, and that he had the matter under active study. In September, the calling of a White House Conference was formally announced.

Simultaneously the President released a document entitled "Progress Report" which had been produced by eight doctors (three M.D.'s, four Ph.D.'s, and one who held both degrees) designated as an Ad Hoc Panel on Drug Abuse to confer with the White House Science Advisor and give advice on what should be done. The members of this panel could not be faulted for their collective eminence, but none of them had theretofore been closely identified with drug-abuse problems, so their findings were developed from what might be termed a slightly fresh viewpoint. They started from the hypothesis that nearly all compulsive drug abusers could be rehabilitated, by which they meant withdrawn from drugs and re-established in society, since they found drug abuse was inevitably a manifestation of some underlying psychological or physiological disorder:
Compulsive abuse of drugs is not an illness to which any member of society can succumb. Instead, it is limited to those susceptible with prerequisite disorders; individuals who would not otherwise be normal members of society but whose inadequacies would in all likelihood manifest themselves in some other way.

Accordingly they rejected proposals for imposing long prison sentences on drug offenders, on the one hand, and for placing addicts on any kind of maintenance regime, on the other. Instead they urged lengthy and extensive parole supervision in all cases, following the pattern that had been developed (not surprisingly) in California.

This panel (which adopted the figure of 45,000 for the total number of drug users in the United States as of mid-1962) also slapped down some of the Narcotics Bureau’s most sacred dogma: heroin, they said, has no effects significantly different from those of morphine; drug addiction is almost never induced by drug peddlers "with economic motive in mind"; it is not realistic to distinguish sharply between users and peddlers, since most of the traffic is carried on by addicts who peddle to support their own habits; and doctors have a clear right under existing laws to treat addicts, so the medical profession ought to take matters into its own hands and set its own standards of good medical practice in the field. Regarding education about drugs, the panel observed: "The general public has not been informed of most of the important facts related to drug abuse and, therefore, has many misconceptions which are frightening and destructive." On marijuana:

Though this drug has long held the reputation of inciting individuals to commit sexual offenses and other antisocial acts, the evidence for this is limited. . . . it is the opinion of the Panel that the hazards of marijuana use have been exaggerated and that long criminal sentences imposed on an occasional user or possessor of the drug are in poor social perspective.

And regarding drug abuse and youth, the report concluded:

The claims of an increase of juvenile narcotic addiction may have been correct in the immediate post World War II era, but the available statistics do not indicate such an incidence now. . . .

The most frequent narcotic drug abuse appears to be centered in the 20-35 year age group, with a peak occurring in the middle years.

Noting indications that drugs in the barbiturate and amphetamine categories were beginning to be abused, the panel recommended that the medical profession (not lawmakers, but doctors) "should adopt guidelines concerning their proper use." The panelists thought it possible that these latter drugs might come to be more widely abused, and possibly by more juveniles, because they were so cheap, so easy to handle, and so readily obtainable, but they dismissed LSD and related hallucinogenic compounds as "of minor importance in the general picture of drug abuse." Their overall conclusion was this:
Important as is the drug problem it is often grossly exaggerated in the daily press, and
hysteria replaces sober judgment in many discussions and decisions. The exploitation of
this tragic waste of human talent must cease to function as a promotion for mass media
sales.

The Ad Hoc Panel bore down heavily on one new concept which somehow never took
hold, but which suggests interesting speculations about other lines that might have been
developed at the ensuing conference had the direction been a little different: the panelists
were impressed by recent research indicating that the abuse of all drugs, including even
the most addicting opiates, was widely engaged in on a casual or "spree" basis, in
patterns similar to that of the nonalcoholic who occasionally takes on a good Saturday
night load. Rejecting statistical measurements of the extent of true addiction, the panel
thus implied that part of the clandestine drug traffic might not be related to serious
addiction and abuse problems but to supporting use on a "spree" basis without
significantly damaging social consequences. However, this theme has not attracted much
attention since, even though the evidence as to "spree" use is substantial.

Commissioner Anslinger's resignation was announced in August 1962, just before the Ad
Hoc Panel released its final report, and it came as a surprise even to his nonadulating
watchers. He continued to serve in his post at the U.N. Commission, but seemed to
withdraw from the national scene. The naming of his successor also stirred surprise and
puzzlement, at least among those who had been led to hope for changes in policy. Instead
of a doctor (as was rumored), or at least a fresh-minded outsider (as was expected), the
President chose career Bureau official Henry L. Giordano, who had served Anslinger
faithfully ever since joining up as a field agent in 1941 (and who happened,
coincidentally, to be a Californian).

The White House Conference had been announced in a brief statement in which the
President named his brother, the Attorney General, to serve as general chairman, and said
that in deciding to call the conference he had discussed the matter with Governor Brown
of California, who had agreed that such a gathering would be helpful.

We shall have more to say about so-called dangerous drugs in later chapters. But the
events of 1962-63 being considered here had a great deal to do with America's
commitment to her present campaign against them, a campaign which may yet prove less
wise and more hurtful than even the great 18th Amendment aberration. In the interim
between President Kennedy's reluctant commitment to sponsor the conference and its
actual convocation, pressure was generated within the administration to come up with
something different, preferably a fresh theme dissociated from the shopworn Harrison
Act, and outside the Treasury Department's field so it could be developed as a vehicle for
promoting the image of the Attorney General. That was what the Ad Hoc Committee's
survey was really supposed to turn up. And what it led to was the new concept--or, more
accurately, new bird-call phrase--"drug abuse," which could embrace 'dangerous' drugs.

Accordingly, what had been described in May as a White House Conference on
"Narcotics" was rechristened "Conference on Narcotic and Drug Abuse," and President
Kennedy himself opened the proceedings on September 27, 1962, with a plug for the new theme:

One area of inquiry meriting special attention deals with the growing abuse of nonnarcotic drugs, including barbiturates and amphetamines. Society's gains will be illusory if we reduce the incidence of one kind of drug dependence, only to have new kinds of drugs substituted. The use of these drugs is increasing problems of abnormal and antisocial behavior, highway accidents, juvenile delinquency, and broken homes. An especially disturbing aspect of the alarming increase in the illegal traffic in these drugs is their particular attraction to juveniles because of the ease with which they can be obtained and their extremely low cost in comparison with narcotic drugs.

Attorney General Kennedy's message left himself a very clear field indeed:

As you know, this Conference was not called to provide a forum for certain theories nor to reach what might at best be arbitrary solutions. This Conference is designed as the preceding panels have demonstrated to help us recognize what we know about the problem and, perhaps more important, how much we don't know. Our major aim is to reemphasize that we do, indeed, need answers and to determine how we can best find them on a rational and national basis. . . .

Above all else, sound information must form the basis of future legislation—legislation which is broadly directed toward the general problem of compulsive drug abuse, so that it will be both appropriate to the situation at hand and flexible to meet new and changing manifestations of this unresolved disorder. . . .

I hope, however, that we can point the way to more than information. I hope we can also chart directions for action.

More than 400 people turned out for the conference, and their number included virtually everyone who had been prominently connected with any aspect of the drug problem in recent years. But for the most part the long-time experts and the old-timers were in the audience rather than among the speakers or panelists, and the format of the conference excluded symposium discussion. Californians were much in evidence. Governor Brown, the only governor, shared the program on the first day with the President, three Cabinet members, and Mayor Wagner, the only mayor, while a dozen other Californians, led by Attorney General Mosk, made their appearance as panelists during the two days of the proceedings.

Since its mandate was merely to exchange views, not to arrive at solutions, the conference provided little more than a publicity medium for favorite spokesmen. Secretary Dillon of Treasury restated the traditional position of the Narcotics Bureau-
severe penalties, no drugs to addicts under any circumstances, but due regard withal for human and social problems: "Narcotics addiction is neither a normal, nor a socially acceptable practice. . . . Whatever its cause, treatment and cure must be sought." HEW Secretary Celebrezze said the conference marked the beginning of a new era and that everyone should put aside his old superstitions and fears, but at the same time we should not lose sight of the importance of a continuing drive against the criminal traffic in addicting drugs. He then added a pitch for the new category:

We badly need stricter controls over the manufacture and distribution of the addicting nonnarcotic drugs, which today constitute a major problem in enforcement. These drugs enter illicit channels in ever-increasing quantity, and our young people, particularly, are led into addiction under the mistaken belief that these drugs are relatively harmless.

Governor Brown sounded uncharacteristically tough, talking about his "grim war on narcotics," but he himself explained that he had only a few days left in his campaign against Nixon: "I'm in the position of a rancher who rides away from his range in the middle of the night when he knows there is a rustler in the area." He reported that California had definitely "turned the tide," that in the preceding year state officials had "quarantined 1,000 addicts for intensive treatment under tight control and strict discipline," and that there were more than 5,000 drug offenders serving time in California prisons. The Governor related with pride how hard he had worked for stiffer criminal penalties, and said that drug addicts suffered from a contagious disease and must be isolated; they were, he said, like typhoid sufferers who must be forcibly kept away from poisoned wells. He told of a new California law which permitted incarceration of addicts for periods of up to five years, and announced that his state was building a rehabilitation center for the treatment of addicts in custody. Then he too chimed the new note:

In California, our vigorous narcotics enforcement program is causing the sale of marijuana and heroin to level off. . . .

But the decline in heroin sales has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the use of dangerous drugs such as phenobarbital, seconal, nembutal, and benzedrine. In short, the peddlers are turning to a new line of merchandise which is less dangerous for them but every bit as deadly for their old customers. This is an escape hatch which I intend to close as quickly as possible. I believe we must be as severe on those who spread through dangerous drugs as we now are with those who sell heroin.

Mayor Wagner of New York said the conference was "the dawning of a new day," and that everyone ought to address the subject "seriously rather than sensationally." Then, after repeating how little anyone really knew about the problem, he took some wide swings at his city's addicts:
In many if not most cases—and we have, of course, no facts on this—the addict becomes not only a social outcast but an enemy of society, an enemy of law and order.

It can scarcely be contradicted that the present crime situation in New York City is traceable to a major extent to the insatiable driving need of narcotic addicts for the money to satisfy their habits, regardless of the most heroic police measures to control the thief and the mugger.

Even Mr. Anslinger made a subdued appearance, speaking about international controls and his work at the U.N., and ending with an appeal (which must have stuck in his throat) from the U.N. Commission to national governments to "take appropriate measures" to place the production, distribution, and use of the barbiturates and other nonnarcotic drugs—whose repression he had always vigorously opposed—under strict national limitations.

Other speakers hammered the same theme. Commissioner Larrick of the Food and Drug Administration reported the struggles of his agency to stem the rising tide:

This audience does not need a recitation of the deplorable and, in many cases pathetic, situations which were reported to us. People of all levels of society are involved. We followed through on reports on the sale of these drugs without prescriptions, as well as the repeated illegal refills of prescriptions without the authority of the prescriber. We engaged in undercover work to break up the sale of amphetamines to truck drivers. California Attorney General Mosk pulled all stops: When we talk about addiction in California, we are not talking only about heroin and other opium derivatives; we are talking about the dangerous drugs, to which considerable reference has already been made. We have seen a dramatic rise in the misuse of these drugs during the past 18 months. Our State bureau of criminal statistics which is an arm of my office, pinpoints the 1961 increase over 1960 in the illegal use of these drugs at 31 per cent. Among our juvenile population, it was even higher, about 36 per cent.

In this regard, it should be noted that dangerous drugs are creating an entirely new class of addicts. In California, the vast majority of narcotic addicts have been in trouble with the law or to their involvement with narcotics. This does not appear to the case, however, with dangerous drugs.

It has been asked how dangerous are the dangerous drugs. We consider them very dangerous. Senseless murders have been committed by persons under their influence. There have been armed robberies of pharmacies to obtain them. Automobile accidents have been caused by them. And they are dangerous in this sense: They appeal to and can be obtained by persons who might never try or might never come into contact with heroin or marijuana.
The overall conclusion reached by the conference was that the entire drug field was characterized by misinformation and inadequate facts, and thus there was an urgent need for research to produce reliable data, a structure for efficient dissemination of such data, and a more practical evaluation program for its application to the problem. It also concluded that the apparent increase in abuse of nonnarcotic drugs "has grave future implications if remedial action is not taken now." As for treatment and rehabilitation, all past and current efforts were found to have been unsuccessful "except for promising civil commitment programs . . . in California and New York." The final note was a clarion call "for total involvement of all the Federal, State, and community resources on an interrelated basis."