

Martha Mitchell Wants

By Myra MacPherson

She walks tilted slightly forward because of the shoes—high, pencil-thin spikes, "pearlized" leather, open-toed, sling-backed.

They have been called her trademark and derided by some for being a vintage style. But Martha pays no mind.

"That's just too bad," she says. "Who sets the styles? I'm not going to change my wardrobe."

Mrs. Mitchell—the 51-year-old former small-town Arkansas girl turned wife of a Cabinet officer — walks like someone who has been complimented in the past for her slim legs and tiny feet. Her legs are still slim, but two recent diets have failed to conquer waistline bulges.

She is dressed in a blue- and white-checked

two-piece dress with white loop trim around the sleeves, sparkly buttons down the front, elephant earrings, a very blond fall halfway to her shoulder blades, a white bow, an elephant pin, a gold bracelet, pinkish-purple nail polish and lipstick to match. Her clothes come from a New York shop called fittingly, "Martha's."

The wife of the Attorney General is in her Watergate East Apartment and she considers it a perfect setting for her. "It's me," she says.

The living room and entranceway are wedge-wood blue. There is a blue satin sofa, an organ, a grand piano, elaborately scrolled French chairs, marble coffee tables, armoires loaded with bric-a-brac—one with satin-skirted dolls; another with plates and cups and figurines.

1970

K1

to Stay and Fight

The dining room: oriental rugs and brocade drapes; rose and blue. The powder room: gold and green flocked wallpaper, a marble-topped sink, an ornate silver brush and mirror set. A bas relief of cherubs is on the stairway wall leading to the bedrooms. At the top of the landing is a portrait of her husband. There are both plastic and real plants.

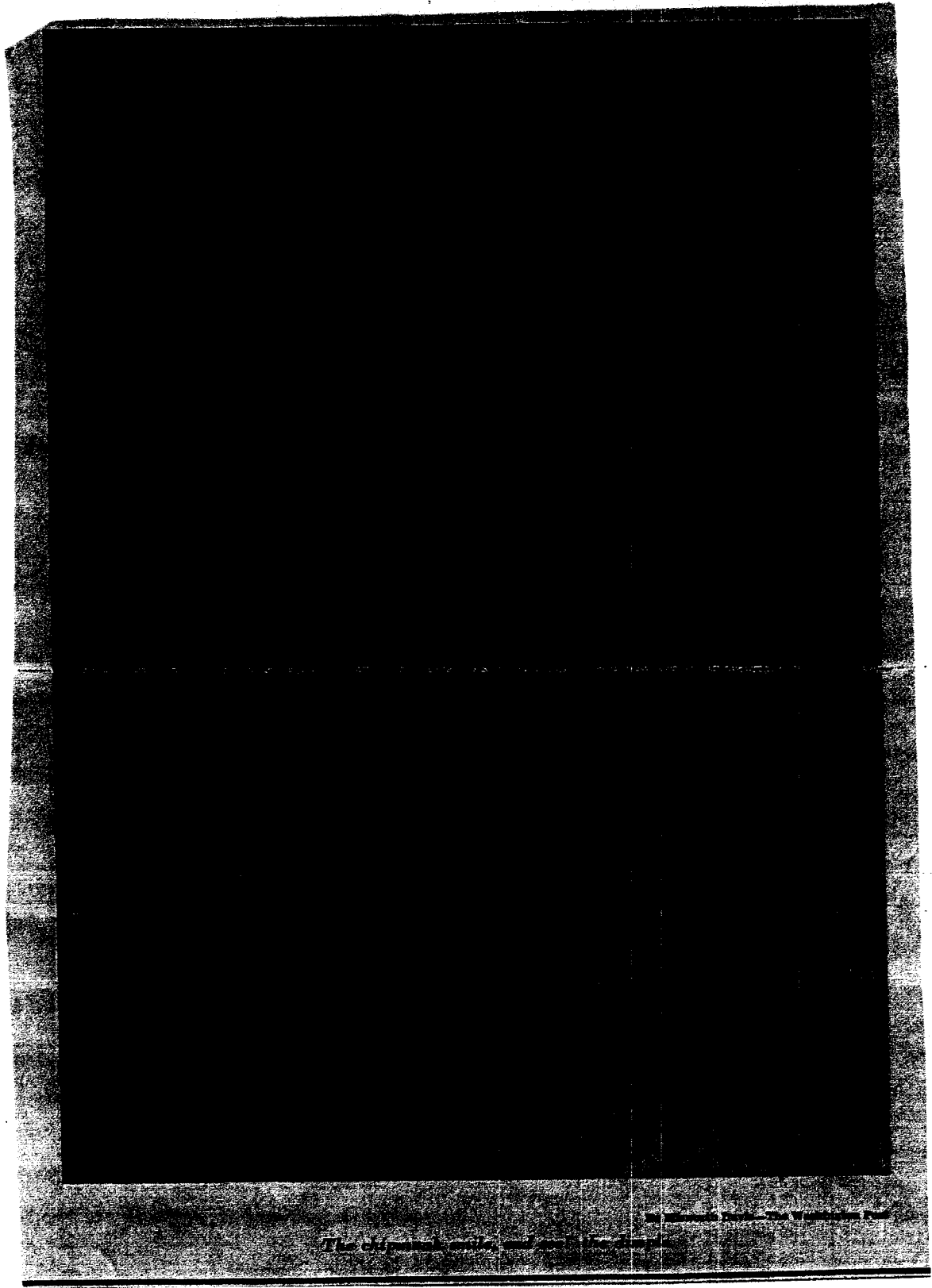
Mrs. Mitchell is especially proud of one mirror. It is large, with vari-colored flowers painted all around the border. She got it from the Fontainebleau Hotel: "There's one room there, the mirror room. They brought them over from Paris. A whole bunch. It had the old glass but I couldn't stand it and had it taken out."

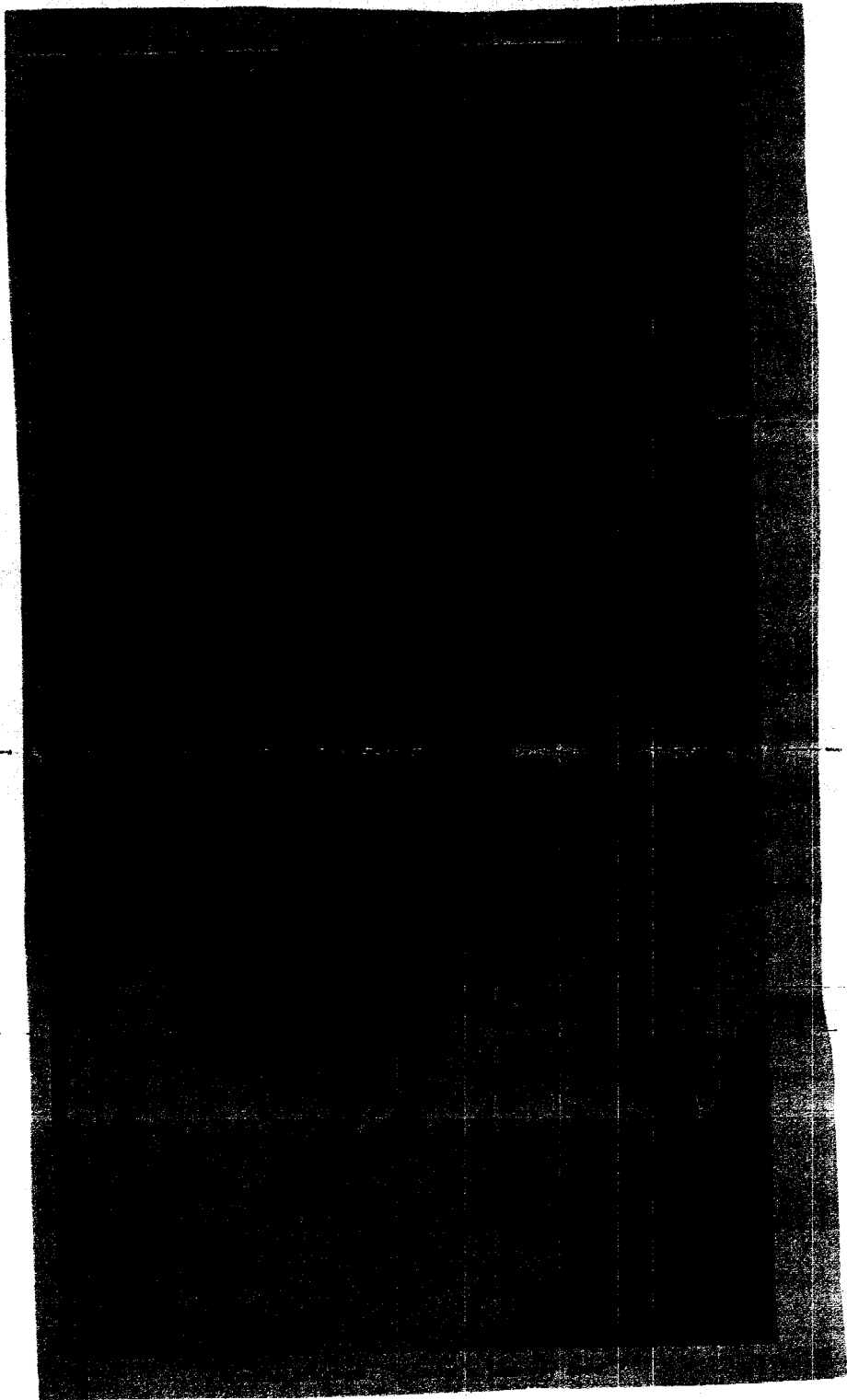
She sits down, nursing a coke in a glass with the map of Texas outlined on it with jewel-like blobs for major cities. "There's only one place you can get these glasses—and that's Neiman-Marcus."

Mrs. Mitchell lights cigarettes and mashes them out often as she opens a two-hour interview after holding a tea for some Justice Department wives.

Although she left Arkansas years ago, her drawl is complete with Southern Belle phrases such as "Well, bless your heart" and "little ole me." Her smile is chipmunk bright, with the creases meeting the dimples. The smile alternates with a fathomless stare.

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MARTHA, From K1

She once said she didn't like Washington, but this afternoon Mrs. Mitchell says, "It's gotten to be fun. We've got a good fight going. We'll stay and fight a while."

It is unclear who she is fighting and why. She stares when asked to explain "Why, people who keep on my husband. Harp on us all the time, and fight us."

She is asked what she thinks of the U.S. move into Cambodia. "It's 100 per cent wonderful."

Mrs. Mitchell is a lighting rod for the polarization in this country. To many she is a brazen, bombastic woman whose outspokenness is offensive. They consider her opinions extreme, simplistic, intolerant.

But for many, many others—and not only those with ears bearing "God Bless Spiro" bumper stickers—she is a heroine who justifiably attacks a liberal permissiveness they believe has brought chaos to the land.

Her friends view her as a good, honest, forthright American who is saying things they have felt for years. Her enemies view her as a narrow-minded woman who doesn't seem to comprehend the implications of her rhetoric.

Vice President Spiro Agnew, who has been charged with fostering divisiveness and unrest with intemperate remarks, is a kindred soul, according to Mrs. Mitchell. "He's a doll and an angel. He helps, like me, to keep a little laughter goin'."

And of the President's remarks about "bums" on college campuses: "Everybody took his wording out of context, the way they did mine. Just because the President mentioned the word 'bum' everybody grabbed it and everybody became a bum."

Her eyes glisten with pride as she says the President told her, "Give 'em hell, Martha," as she went through a White House receiving line. "I have a won-

derful concept of the President. He'll kill me when I say it, but it's almost a fatherly love. That's how I think of him."

The interview turns to her most recent controversy, prompted by her phone call to the Arkansas Gazette as 2 a.m. asking the paper to "crucify" Sen. J. William Fulbright for voting against the Supreme Court nomination of Judge G. Harold Carswell.

She stiffens and says, "Do you see any reason why if I pay my bills I've got no right to pick up my private telephone and call anyone I want? And 'crucify' is just an idiomatic saying—like someone saying, 'Oh, I could kill you.'"

However there is some rhetoric that she feels is out of line. Late in the interview, Mrs. Mitchell says, "Now let me ask you something. What does the liberal press want? What're they trying to do?"

She throws a match book cover on the coffee table. "If you'd just shut up, we might get something done. They're the ones stirring up the people."

"Write what they want on internal problems, but when it comes to war and our boys being killed . . . if they would just try to make everyone realize we can stick together for a common purpose. On any other concept, let 'em blow."

She says anyone who is against the Cambodia involvement, doesn't know the

facts. "I can assure you, the military moves the President has made are not printable—and it disturbs me that on something as serious as this Asian thing, people come out with opinions when they don't know the facts."

She is asked if she has a certain pride that her husband is regarded as the closest man to the President. "He's not and I happen to know the truth. Many others are as close. In the first place, he's the President's lawyer, he has to see him." She repeats what her husband has said, "He didn't have anything to say about Cambodia."

A photographer asks if he

could move her chair for pictures.

"Go ahead. This whole place is public property anyway. I had to get the rug cleaned after those people dragged all that TV equipment in for that CBS show."

The door bell rings and is answered by her secretary, Kay Woestendiek who is quietly in the apartment but not sitting in on the interview. Mrs. Mitchell yells from her chair: "Who's that?" She's told it's the caterers, come to remove the tea party remains. She calls again, "Tell 'em to take that table out of the hall before the neighbors complain."

As the photographer clicks away, Mrs. Mitchell says, "Please take some good pictures of me. All the time people say, 'Oh, Mrs. Mitchell you're not half as old as they make you look in the paper.'"

She then attempts to clear up her views on Communists, revolutionaries and like dangers to the nation. "I do have very strong feelings about Communists. Anytime we discuss anything about Communists, all of a sudden it takes on the old theory—that McCarthy business. But it's been said time and time again what these rabble rousers get up and talk about—they tell you they want to overthrow the country. That's what I mean when I said liberal Communists and I still mean it. There's a difference in Communists—one is Marx and one is Lenin and I don't know which is which, but one is to overthrow by violence, the other is by peaceful means."

"But it's the revolutionaries that're worrying me. As a matter of fact, a lot of your children are being taken in by them. I don't think the war in Vietnam has anything to do with it. If there were not a war in Vietnam it'd be on another subject. They've got to find something to yell about."

"They come over here and march on me. They go march against pollution."

She punched out her cigarettes and said she had a solution for revolutionaries.

"Ship 'em to Russia, or Cuba. Preferably to Russia."

Cuba's too close. Now be sure you make the difference between revolutionaries and Communists. The only group she named outright as "revolutionaries" were the Black Panthers.

She says Mr. Nixon, Agnew and her husband are being vilified. "It's pitiful. The opposition is trying to get my husband out of Washington."

Why?

"He stands for law and order, number one."

Mrs. Woestendick comes in with a message. When Mrs. Woestendick leaves, she continues: "I was just saying those being critical are the extremists that well—what? I'm not phrasing it very well."

She returns to law and order. "No community can exist without law and order." She is asked for a definition of law and order.

"Bounds set down as our principle."

Principle of what?

"Of law and order!"

She is asked about some who construe her husband's version of law and order as repressive. Does she think it could be construed as repressive?

"Oh heck no! Are you kidding? In order is not law and order." Mrs. Mitchell pauses. "Well, people want to use the word repression. It's got to be repression, because there's just too much permissiveness."

She says permissiveness has caused the drug problem, the campus riots and is what kept her from being a school teacher. She quit after a brief stab at it in Mobile, Ala., "some 20 odd years ago. There was that new form of education that gave freedom of what's the word? Permissiveness, yes permissiveness. The concept was to let the children run wild. It made no sense to me."

Could she see how the wire-tap provision could sound repressive of individual freedom?

"It's done on a very limited basis, number one. If it did interfere with a person's freedom, I wouldn't believe in it."

Asked to comment on the "no-knock" provision in the proposed D.C. crime law—which would allow law enforcement officers to enter homes in certain instances

without knocking, she responds: "It is a question of whether it should be in the proper manner. It's the law."

She's reminded it hasn't been passed yet.

"Really? I'd forgotten."

What would be the proper manner of application?

"I don't know."

What about those who question whether the National Guard should have fired the ammunition at Kent State University? That's hard to say, I don't know the facts. They have to protect themselves. Haven't

the National Guard always carried guns? If they carry guns I see no reason why they should make an exception on campuses."

An organization of 30 black groups protested her husband speaking last week before a Mississippi group that black protestors termed "racist."

Mrs. Mitchell, who went with her husband for the speech, said there was no trouble. She says of the pro-

testing blacks. "They've got to call somebody's name. I have no idea who they are. It's against my husband. He always seemed to be a very liberal man to me."

Her thoughts turned to her childhood in the South. "I can't get over saying 'colored.' I said it all my life. All the Negroes seem to resent it and I don't know why."

She was asked if she ever sensed discrimination or injustice toward blacks.

"During a certain phase of my life, I was brought up by my nurse. Her children and I played together. They lived on the place and I felt close to them."

But she is asked hasn't she observed segregation and discrimination elsewhere?

The stare returns. "It's not just the blacks. Let's face it. There's many groups that had to come up."

Mrs. Mitchell expresses agitation that her nine-year-old daughter, Marty, is late returning from school. The Mitchell's moved into the Watergate for security reasons. She observes a young man in a dark jacket walking in the water.

When her daughter comes in with their driver, Mrs. Mitchell says, "Hello, baby doll." There are hugs and kisses.

There is more talk of the South.

"There is no Southern strategy, except Martha has her Southern strategy. I'm all for the South. Wave the banners! I think the South has been imposed on too long."

Would she wave the Confederate flag?

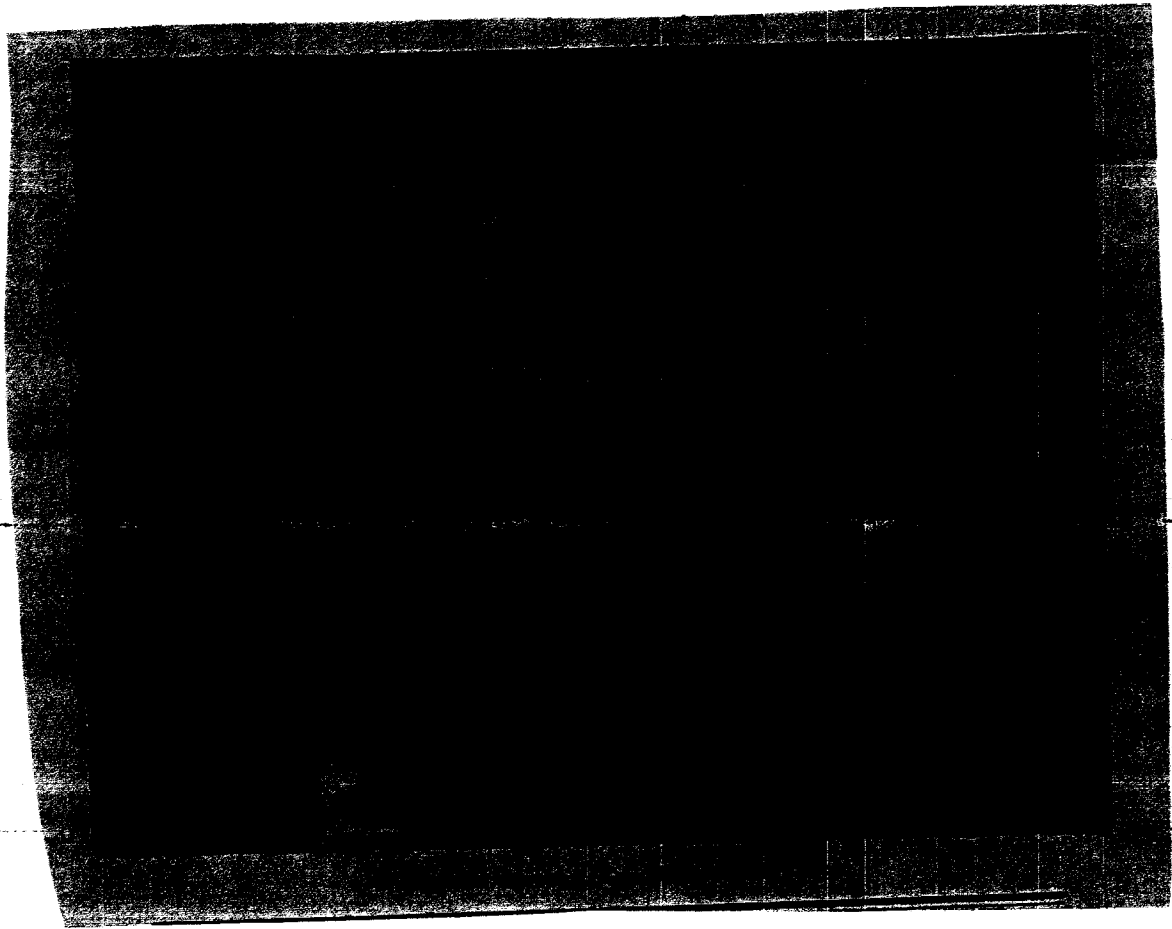
"Always."

"Talk about discrimination! The South has been discriminated against more than you and I know of. For a long time after the Civil War no industry moved into the South. You go back and look up your history."

Speaking of the defeat of the first two Southern nominees for the Supreme Court and the subsequent approval of Judge Harry Blackmun of Minnesota, Mrs. Mitchell says, "I think it's because he didn't come from the South."

Mrs. Mitchell's father was a cotton broker and her mother a speech teacher in Pine Bluff, Ark. "When I was growing up down South

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MARTHA, From K10

the only thing for a Southern lady to do was to teach. That's about the size of it. When I was growing up all the girls got married. It was a place where everybody knew everybody. And we didn't just sit in Pine Bluff. We had parties all over—Shreveport, La.; Jackson, Mississippi."

Southern women weren't active in politics she admits. "They hardly voted, did they? I don't think they even went to the polls. I don't think anyone thought of women being controversial."

World War II played havoc with her social life, she says.

"War really tore up my home town. Instead of marrying hometown boys, we married all over. I wouldn't have married who I did the first time (Clyde Jennings, then a serviceman, now a traveling salesman) if it hadn't been for the war. All my boyfriends were scattered all over the world. I came to Washington to work—it was the only place where there was any activity—and he seemed the only one eligible around at that time. Those war days were something. Rationing and all that. You couldn't go anywhere."

She seems reluctant to talk of Jay, her first son by that marriage. She says abruptly, "He's at Camp Hood."

She says it was love at first sight when she met John Mitchell through mutual friends in New York in the 1950's, when both were separated. "I'd been separated a long time. I was very much down on men." But John's "glorious personality" changed that.

Mrs. Mitchell says she does not believe in integrating schools through busing. "It could be done in other ways, it seems to me."

What ways?

"I haven't thought about it. If I did, I'd come up with an answer—for me at least. This whole concept of busing is absolutely ridiculous. Why should a child—and I don't care what color he is—be dragged out of his neighborhood and transported a long way to school?"

But what is the answer if there are unfit schools in

their areas? "Get rid of the slums and bad neighborhoods and change the schools." But critics say the problem is that money for such domestic changes is going into Vietnam. She replies, "Well, we're not going to get out of anything unless we stay strong together."

Then she claps her hands and says, "Let's promote the word love!"

She talks about racial policies in private clubs: "I'm not speaking of black, yellow or any particular color. I think as an American citizen if I want to have a friend in a bridge club I have a right to select my friends. If you have a club you have a right to select your own friends. I don't believe it has any bearing on integration at all."

Mrs. Mitchell agrees that the country is not in the best shape and says she understands why youth get upset about it. "For one thing, integration should have taken place after the Civil War. It should have been a slow, gradual process, whereas now it would not be such a thing."

Mrs. Mitchell says that she feels that one way campus dissent can be reduced is for government officials to engage in dialogue with administration and campus leaders "who side with the kids."

"We need a common monologue with the people running the schools."

She says her husband has met with university leaders and says she doesn't know why campus administrators side with dissenters. Asked about Yale's president, Kingman Brewster, "I don't even want to talk about him." She adds the kids are "hating too loud."

During the march on the Watergate to protest the Chicago Seven trial verdict, Mrs. Mitchell says, "I was

"As for her outspoken opinions, she says, 'Do you know the students like it? So much of my mail is from them and they say they may not agree with me but 'you speak your mind.'"

right here watching 'em out the window. The truth never came out what they were yelling — Two, four, six, eight! Burn down the Watergate!" She pouts slightly. "Don't you think it's a little silly to march on me? I don't make any decisions."

As for her outspoken opinions, she says, "Do you know the students like it? So much of my mail is from them and they say they may not agree with me but 'you speak your mind.'"

She says her husband would never stop her from speaking out — "not if I wanted to, in the first place. It's done some good. Other people are feeling freer, able to speak up." Asked if her husband ever got mad at her, she says, "Yes. He got mad when I said he had two double chins."

Recently her secretary's husband was fired from an educational TV news show because the station thought his wife's job was a conflict of interest. Later, when she got a letter requesting contributions to educational television, she wrote back "Haven't you got the wrong person?"

Talking about political figures, she says, "I think Mayor Lindsay ought to become a Democrat. Oh wait, write that again." She smiles, then changes it to, "I think Mayor Lindsay ought to start his own party."

Is it true that at a dinner party she told Illinois Republican Sen. Charles Percy that he was the "type of liberal who was selling the United States down the river to the Communists?"

Mrs. Mitchell says, "I have fun kidding Charlie. So many people don't know when I'm kidding or not. He doesn't himself. He's real cute. Don't you think Charlie's cute?"

The Mitchell social schedule is packed. The nights they eat at home alone together are rare. She says

her husband can't relax. "It's tenfold what a doctor's life is like. He never goes off call so to speak. If there is anything going on in this country, our phone rings all night long. He leaves the office around seven and before he can get home, the telephone lights up like a switchboard."

On the few nights they are home, Mrs. Mitchell says she goes to bed at 9 p.m. She says she reads a lot, but is vague about titles. "I haven't read novels recently. I don't like reading trash. It's one sex novel after another."

"I used to encourage Marty to read magazines. One day she was reading a certain magazine which had a great deal about sex and the birth of a child and Marty, bless her heart, came to me and said, 'This is the last of my reading magazines. This isn't suited for my eyes.'"

When some obscene mail came addressed to Marty, Mrs. Mitchell forwarded it to the Justice Department. She says the Department "succeeded in getting indictments against three companies."

What about sex education in the schools? "I don't know enough about it, but I really think they started too early to teach it."

As for Women's Lib groups, "I just can't comment on them. I just wonder how they have any respect for themselves. I know when I was growing up, come Sunday, I couldn't wait to wear my go-to-church clothes. Today when I wear something fancy and pretty it still gives me a lift."

Mrs. Mitchell does believe however, that women have been discriminated against. "I'm a perfect example of a woman discriminated against. If I were a man and say what I say, nobody in the world would pay one iota of attention to me."