

'Cosmetic' Catchwords

To the Editor:

Attorney General John Mitchell's expressed preference for the term "quick entry" over the scorned catchword "no-knock" provides glaring evidence of the way in which Government currently uses words as cosmetics to delude the public and even itself.

The Nixon Administration seems particularly inclined to this practice—hence, directing firepower across international frontiers becomes merely "suppressive reaction"; tender concern for bruised sensibilities of segregationists masquerades as the dignified legal tradition of "strict constructionism"; a practice that smacks of officially sanctioned breaking and entering is innocuously labelled "quick entry."

Are the nation's highest officials committed to the cynical proposition that men are ruled by names? It is essence, and not name, that is important in considering the "no-knock" innovation, and no amount of public relations camouflaging will serve to render this provision of the crime bill any less obnoxious. [Editorial July 17.]

Moreover, Mr. Mitchell's defense of unannounced entry on the grounds that law enforcement officials are still obliged to secure a court warrant misses the fundamental point at issue. The right to security in the home has in practice come to mean that officers, armed with legally obtained warrants, must knock and identify themselves before entering.

The Attorney General does not seem to realize that toleration of one abridgement in the name of expediency is usually prelude to yet another, until at last "the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects" becomes but a hollow mockery of its former self.

Alarmist? Perhaps. But isn't this the way liberty is frequently lost—piecemeal?

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