

Camera Obscura

The list of six men and women whose names were published yesterday as leading candidates for the two vacant seats in the Supreme Court suggests once again that Mr. Nixon is trifling with the prestige and authority of the nation's highest tribunal. The utter lack of distinction of at least four of the six candidates—however worthy they may be as individual citizens—reveals a continuing failure of the President to reach for acceptable standards of appointment to this pinnacle of the American judiciary.

By no stretch of the imagination would these six names be considered representative of the most highly qualified legal minds, the most experienced or thoughtful members of the bench or bar, men or women whose personal, professional or intellectual attainment would be recognized throughout the country as fitting prelude to service on the Supreme Court. Instead, what is the caliber of the candidates? A career politician from West Virginia, former organizer for the Ku Klux Klan, a Senator whose public record is marked by racism and reaction. A local judge in the District of Columbia whose only claim to fame lies in the tough "law and order" legislation she drafted as an employe of the Department of Justice. A former domestic relations judge in Los Angeles. A Little Rock lawyer whose most notable legal work was in resisting school desegregation. And two respectable if undistinguished Federal Court of Appeals judges, who at least are not known to have anything against them.

The very fact that the Committee of the Judiciary of the American Bar Association has been given only a few days in which to rush out an evaluation of these obscure candidates before the President announces his two choices suggests that Mr. Nixon and Mr. Mitchell are not really very interested in the findings. In fact, there hardly seems much point in the A.B.A. taking all that trouble.

"Respect for law in a nation is the most priceless asset a free people can have," Mr. Nixon has correctly said, "and [the members of the Supreme Court] are the ultimate custodians and guardians of that priceless asset." In view of the general quality of most of the six top candidates, what respect can the President expect the American people to have for a Court for which he himself shows so little respect by the nature of his proposed appointments?