

RICHARD NIXON may be the off-star of "All the President's Men," the current movie box office hit, but he didn't even get that slight attention at the Republican Convention. He was on the minds of a lot of delegates — no doubt about that — but they found it very easy to keep their mouths shut on camera.

Nixon did almost make it into the party platform when the plank on China was being written. Republican credit was being taken for a dialogue "with the leaders of a quarter of the Earth's population." But before the booklet got to the printer, he was edited out and no mention was made of the man who made that historic trip to Peking.

Later, in his keynote address, Senator Howard Baker briefly raised and neatly disposed of the "dusty, old skeletons" of Watergate without mentioning you-know-who. Although any number of delegates — especially those with extensive experience in politics — would privately discuss Mr. Nixon and those troubles with not a little compassion, he remains a public embarrassment.

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THERE IS THE OUTSPOKEN HOPE that he will fade away from memory — theirs and the voters'. "No doubt, he's going to hurt us and hurt us like hell," a pro-Ford state chairman told me.

In fact, I found only one incident of public recognition of the avid TV fan watching the convention closely from a chair at Casa Pacifica on our Southern California coast. That was when a man wearing one of those realistic Nixon masks



was muscled out of the lobby of the Ford Headquarters hotel by two Secret Service agents. He said he was the official chairman of the Yippie delegation from Texas. Regardless of his status, he had been drinking.

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APART FROM NIXON, the convention was not adverse at all to recalling earlier political disasters. They heard from aged Alf Landon, who led the party in 1936 to the worst defeat in its history, worse even than the first Republican effort in 1856 with John C. Fremont. The delegates also listened to tired and ailing Senator Barry Goldwater who lost so severely a dozen years ago. He said it was his last convention and he left after one session.

Losing, yes, is a serious political sin but throwing it away after winning at the polls is rated as even more reprehensible. The pros here can't forget it.

They don't seem to bear Ronald Reagan any strong malice, however, even though he came within an eyebrow of upsetting their hold on the national party apparatus. Ending up only 60 votes short against an incumbent President was a score that impressed the political operators. He had a hold on his supporters that held through what had become the inevitable losing roll call.

Mature men cried on the convention floor at the end. No less than 68 of the 167 California delegates refused even to allow the state to make a motion giving Ford a unanimous nomination as a gesture of party unity. But even though the Reagan supporters will soon bury their grief, his absence from the ticket will hurt California Republicans severely in November. The emotion he was able to evoke will not be there.