

# The New York Times

## Voices Silenced, Faces Preserved

August 9, 2009

By RANDY KENNEDY

BUFFALO

ON the wall above the kitchen table in Milton Rogovin's modest home here hangs a handwritten sign listing some of the notable events of 1909: Geronimo's death in prison; the first full year of production for Ford's Model T; the founding of what was to become the N.A.A.C.P.; the birth in New York City of Milton Rogovin, who, approaching 100, is one of the country's most revered social-documentary photographers.



Mr. Rogovin was an optometrist whose business was decimated and his children shunned after he refused to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1958. An article published that year in The New York Times reported that friendly witnesses described him as "the chief Communist in the area." He turned to photography because his "voice was essentially silenced," as he once said. What followed was more than 40 years of powerfully straightforward pictures of others without voices: the poor and working class of Buffalo's East Side and Lower West Side, Appalachia, Mexico, Chile and other countries.

Visiting Mr. Rogovin has long been a rite for photographers, curators, historians, activists and writers. These days, in tenuous health, he no longer actively photographs. His wife of 61 years, Anne, an educator and writer who was an active partner in his projects, died in 2003. And his basement darkroom is now mostly empty, his negatives, contacts and prints having moved to institutions like the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Library of Congress. (He has been nominated to receive this year's National Medal of Arts, the kind of establishment recognition a former card-carrying Communist never expected.)

Over lunch recently with his daughter, Ellen Rogovin Hart, Mr. Rogovin opened his picture notebooks as if they were family albums, to take another visitor through an exceptional half-century record of struggle, suffering, determination and hope.

"I made a lot of use of that darkroom down there, oh boy," he said, adding with a smile, "Well, enough is enough."