

Remember Carl Mydans

By Dirck Halstead

Modern photojournalism has had a relatively short life. If you start with the premise that the profession that came with the big picture magazines really is only about eight decades old, it is not surprising that the giants who emerged during this period are beginning to die.



Carl Mydans (1907-2004)

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In the past month, two of the greatest have left us. First, it was Henri Cartier-Bresson, who more than any photographer defined "the decisive moment," then in August, Carl Mydans, who was without doubt one of the greatest of the original Life photographers.

It was interesting that both photographers received huge obits on the pages of The New York Times. The sheer scope of these obituaries was generally reserved for great writers, poets, designers and heads of state.

Carl Mydans was often overlooked when compared with some of his more colorful colleagues, such as Alfred Eisenstaedt, Margaret Bourke-White and Gordon Parks. Some critics called his work ordinary. But for those who knew better, Carl was without doubt the best photojournalist of them all.

What made his work so special was that Carl was first and always a journalist. He viewed his job as being a witness to history. To Carl, the written word was as important as the photography. In a closet in his Larchmont N.Y., home, which he shared with his wife Shelley until she died several years ago, were thousands of reporter's notebooks. He made a lifetime habit of sitting down at the end of every day and meticulously recording what he saw and heard. These notebooks are a huge legacy to historians.

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