

of Marlboro magazine ads. (The Marlboro Man will continue in the magazine ads themselves.) Just as Sherrie Levine photographed the work of Walker Evans, Prince photographed the work of the Leo Burnett Agency. "I'll personally miss them," Prince said of the giant Marlboro ads. "Every time I see one I like, it looks like one of mine, and that makes me feel good."

Prince got the idea for the cowboy pictures in the seventies, when he was working at Time-Life, ripping up magazines in order to assemble tear sheets for the company's writers. Each week, he'd be left with just the ad pages, and

each week those pages would include ads for Marlboro. The ads suited Prince's artistic purposes, because they tended to be full-page and had very little copy. In 1980, Prince, who had already completed a project rephotographing ads for Seaman's living-room ensembles from the *Times Magazine*, started snapping photos of the cigarette cowboys. In a strange way, it was as if he were putting together a documentary of the consumer life.

"I wanted to take another picture and produce a real photograph of it," Prince says. "These pictures were part of my landscape, even though the landscape was in a magazine. I wasn't outside, looking at the street. I was inside, looking at a magazine all day. It seemed to be a natural thing to consider."

Prince says he didn't pick the Marlboro Men because he liked cowboys. He picked them because there were so many to choose from and because he liked the way they looked in his camera. "There's something about a rider on a horse—it's like a car, it fits the golden rectangle," he says. "That's a very classical, Greek ideal, and that's always very attractive." On the other hand, even Prince couldn't fully escape the lure of the open range. "I don't feel like a cowboy, and I don't feel I could be a cowboy, but it's like when a child plays at cowboys and Indians, there's a desire there. At the end of the day, though, I certainly don't sit down in my leather chaps. But I don't know. Maybe somehow I wish I could."

Formally elegant, iconographically resonant, the Marlboro ads seem to give us everything we could want from a billboard or a page in a magazine. But Prince points to something more. "There is no sky that looks like that in real life," he says.

"What's in those pictures could exist only in those pictures."

And yet it's far from clear that Philip Morris needs the Marlboro Man billboards in order to prosper. The company, after all, has been more than willing to cast the highway cowboys aside in exchange for an end to the threat of litigation. And Prince, for one, has no doubts on this score. "People

smoked before those ads, and they'll continue to smoke after they're gone. I don't think they sold a single cigarette," he says. "Hell, when I smoked, I smoked Camels."

—JAMES SUROWIECKI



Richard Prince

DEPT. OF TIMING

It's never a good moment to ask Americans to turn off the TV.



BY all rights, Wednesday, April 21st, should have been the high point of Henry Labalme's five-year crusade to persuade Americans to spend less time watching television and more time reading books, riding bikes, and talking to each other. After years of gathering data and building a solid grassroots organization, he had finally attached his cause to a real bully pulpit. At noon on that day, Surgeon General David Satcher publicly endorsed Labalme's fifth annual National TV-Turnoff Week, unveiling a special poster to be draped in front of television screens across the country for the next seven days.

But the previous day two teen-agers in Littleton, Colorado, had opened fire on their high school, and TV-Turnoff Week ended up being one of the biggest TV-watching weeks of the year. ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and MSNBC all reported

huge ratings boosts from their coverage of the shootings. "NBC Nightly News" racked up "double-digit viewer growth in both total viewers and homes," according to an NBC spokesperson. "News with Brian Williams' rocketed 105%," crowed an MSNBC press release, which also pointed out that the network had "shattered its previous peak quarter-hour record... during John Gibson's interview with a Columbine High School student." CNN reported its best day of the year, with ratings up four hundred and twenty-five per cent, and CBS's "48 Hours" scored its best ratings in nearly two years.

Labalme, an avid kayaker who hasn't had a television set in his home for nearly twenty years, isn't amused by the irony. "Here you have the nation's top public health official recommending that people turn off the TV for health reasons, and then something happens that may have been caused by TV in the first place," he said from his headquarters in Washington, D.C., the other day. "And yet it compels people to watch TV even more!"

This is not the first time that the anticipated serenity of TV-Turnoff Week has been destroyed by mayhem. Just days before the inaugural TV-Turnoff Week, in April, 1995, Timothy McVeigh blew up the Murrah federal building, in Oklahoma City. "I was doing a radio interview at the time," Labalme recalls, "and they had to cut it short because of a report coming in about a major explosion." The anti-TV forces didn't stand much of a chance. "People love to watch that stuff," Labalme said. "That is what television excels at—broadcasting dramatic and gory details of personal tragedy, and then re-broadcasting them again and again."

His own streak of bad luck aside, Labalme's real concern is that the exhaustive coverage of the Colorado shootings may provide the seed for next month's crisis. "Certainly one can make the argument that the attention given to both the perpetrators and the victims sets up the conditions for the next tragedy," he said. That's what seems to have happened last year, he pointed out, when a school shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas, came three months after a school shooting in Stamps, Arkansas, which came only two weeks after a school shooting in Paducah, Kentucky, which had followed one in Pearl, Mississippi, by a couple of months—all of them extensively covered by TV news.