THE KELLOGG AWARD
Williams College
Saturday, June 10, 2006

The Kellogg Award is named for James C. Kellogg, a member of the Class of 1937 who made his mark in financial circles and became chairman of the New York Stock Exchange in 1956. It is presented each year to a Williams graduate with a similarly distinguished career.

This year’s recipient majored in political science at Williams, served on College Council and on the Williams Record staff, went on to take a law degree from Yale, and started his career as a law school professor. So far, so... conventional. But then he began leading his students on field trips to institutions where horrific legal consequences were realized — mostly out of public view. To bring these issues to light, he boldly decided to record them on film. His first feature-length work, of a Massachusetts hospital for the criminally insane, simultaneously launched his career and a free-speech battle that went all the way to the United States Supreme Court.

Since then, he and his camera have illuminated a high school, a hospital, a juvenile court, a welfare office, a police department, and an Army boot camp. He has brought viewers to Aspen, Colorado; Belfast, Maine; Central Park; the Sinai Desert; a Neiman Marcus in Dallas, Texas, and a primate research center in Atlanta, Georgia. He has captured men and women making everything from ballet to red meat, from fashion shows to nuclear missiles. And he has examined human conditions from insanity, to blindness, to the moment before death itself.

Forsaking narration or music, he lets real people and places speak for themselves. And over the course of a career he once referred to as “one long film,” he has explored poverty, prejudice, and other unfinished American business.

Having made nearly 40 movies in as many years, he is now, according to one English critic, “the American documentary filmmaker.” As Williams observed when granting him an honorary degree in 1976, “Avoiding indignation and fashionable ideology…you have helped us see ourselves and our society more clearly.”

“What makes a great filmmaker?” asks the renowned director Errol Morris. “Someone who has created his own universe, someone who has provided a new vision of our universe. [This man] has done both.”

It is a privilege to present this year’s Kellogg Award to a member of the Class of 1951:

Frederick Wiseman