AT BERKELEY

A FILM BY FREDERICK WISEMAN

A ZIPPORAH FILMS, INC. Release
Frederick Wiseman’s *At Berkeley* is a documentary film about the University of California at Berkeley, the oldest and most prestigious member of a ten campus public education system and one of the finest research and teaching facilities in the world.

The film shows the major aspects of university life with particular emphasis on the administrative efforts to maintain the academic excellence, public role, and the economic, racial and social diversity of the student body of America’s premiere public university in the face of drastic budgetary cuts imposed by the State of California. *At Berkeley* shows how a major American university is administered and suggests the complex relationship among its various constituencies - students, faculty, administrators, alumni, the City of Berkeley, the State of California and the federal government.

In a more abstract way, the film looks closely at Berkeley’s intellectual and social mission, its obligation to the state and to larger ideas of higher education as well as illustrates how decisions are made and implemented by the administration in collaboration with its various constituencies.
My film about the University of California at Berkeley presents a strong and accomplished administration and faculty working hard to maintain - in the face of a severe financial crisis - the standards and integrity of a great public university, which is at the service of highly intelligent and diverse students. It was a privilege to film at Berkeley. The film is consistent with my efforts to make documentaries about as many aspects of human behavior as I can. I think it is just as important for the filmmaker to show people of intelligence, character, tolerance and goodwill hard at work as it is to make movies about the failures, insensitivities and cruelties of others. *At Berkeley* is an illustration of this idea.

I spent 12 weeks at Berkeley and shot 250 hours of material. *At Berkeley* is the second film I have made shooting HD. The editing of the film took 14 months spread out over a two-and-a-half-year period. I had to complete the editing of my film *Crazy Horse* (2011) before I could begin *At Berkeley* and interrupted the editing to shoot another film, about the National Gallery in London. *At Berkeley* is the 38th film in my series about contemporary institutions. The crew consisted of myself and two others. No events are staged and there is no artificial lighting.

As in all my documentary films, I had no idea of the themes or structure until I was well advanced in the editing. After the shooting is over I look at all the synchronized rushes and rate them, drawing on the star–rating system created by the Guide Michelin. I give each sequence I might include one to three stars. Upon my first review of the
rushes this usually eliminates about 50 percent of the material. I then edit all the sequences that I think I might include in the final film. I do not begin to assemble the structure until I have edited all the candidate sequences in a close-to-final form. At this point I make the first assembly in three or four days. The first assembly is usually 30 to 40 minutes longer than the final film. I then work on the internal rhythm of each sequence, as well as the external rhythm between the sequences. I have to try and think about the implications of the order of the sequences - their literal meaning and the abstractions suggested by the selected order. The film has to work on both a literal level - the facts and specific nature of each scene have to be clear - and a metaphoric, or abstract, level. The order of the sequences has to suggest ideas beyond their literal meaning. I only consider the film finished when I can go through the entire film, from beginning to end, and explain to myself why each sequence is there and its relationship to the sequences that precede and follow it. When I think the film is done, I go back and look at all the rushes to make sure that there is nothing useful that I have forgotten. I always find sequences or transitions that I initially rejected that help the film.

AT BERKELEY presented a particularly interesting editing problem since the diversity of material was much greater than in any of my previous films. A public university is a complex organism made up of many parts - students, faculty, administrators, staff, police, alumni, politicians and the community in which it is geographically located. In the editing I had to try and find a way to suggest these interrelationships, and their complexity, while simultaneously giving a sense of the entire institution. I have tried to present a portrait of a great public university successfully working through a major financial crisis while maintaining its high standards and international stature.

Frederick Wiseman
Frederick Wiseman is an independent documentary filmmaker. Since 1967 he has directed 40 films, 38 of them documentaries - dramatic, narrative films that seek to portray ordinary human experience in a wide variety of contemporary social institutions. His subjects have included a state hospital for the criminally insane, a high school, a welfare center, juvenile court, a boxing gym, ballet companies in New York and Paris, Central Park, a racetrack, and a Parisian cabaret theater. New York Times film critic Manohla Dargis writes: “Taken together, this is work that presents a sweeping, continuing portrait of modern America, its institutions, social relations, administrative and bureaucratic controls and of course- right at the center of this filmmaker’s unyielding frame - its people.”

Mr. Wiseman has directed two fiction features, Seraphita’s Diary (1982) and The Last Letter (2002). He also works in the theater. In Paris he directed The Belle of Amherst, the play by William Luce about the life of Emily Dickinson, and two plays at La Comédie Française - Samuel Beckett’s Oh Les Beaux
"Jours", and La Dernière Lettre, based on a chapter of Vasily Grossman’s novel, Life and Fate. He also directed The Last Letter (the English version of La Dernière Lettre) at the Theater for a New Audience in New York. The French publisher, Gallimard, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, jointly published the book, Frederick Wiseman, which offers a comprehensive overview of his work through a series of original essays by distinguished critics and artists.

Mr. Wiseman received his BA from Williams College in 1951 and his LLB from Yale Law School in 1954. He has received honorary doctorates from Bowdoin College, Princeton University, and Williams College, among others. He is a MacArthur Fellow, a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and an Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has won numerous awards, including four Emmys. He is also the recipient of the Career Achievement Award from the Los Angeles Film Society (2013); the George Polk Career Award (2006); and the American Society of Cinematographers Distinguished Achievement Award (2006), among many others.

In addition, Frederick Wiseman is a member of multiple artistic associations, including: Theater for a New Audience; The Artistic Council and Board of Directors, Festival Committee, Human Rights Watch International Film Festival; Honorary Member, Les Amis du Cinéma du Réel Association; and a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences.
FILMOGRAPHY

TITICUT FOLLIES, 1967
HIGH SCHOOL, 1968
LAW AND ORDER, 1969
HOSPITAL, 1969
BASIC TRAINING, 1971
ESSENE, 1972
JUVENILE COURT, 1973
PRIMATE, 1974
WELFARE, 1975
MEAT, 1976
CANAL ZONE, 1977
SINAI FIELD MISSION, 1978
MANOEUVRE, 1979
MODEL, 1980

SERAPHITA'S DIARY, 1982
THE STORE, 1983
RACETRACK, 1985
BLIND, 1986
DEAF, 1986
ADJUSTMENT AND WORK, 1986
MULTI-HANDICAPPED, 1986
MISSILE, 1987
CENTRAL PARK, 1989
NEAR DEATH, 1989
ASPEN, 1991
ZOO, 1993
HIGH SCHOOL II, 1994
BALLET, 1995

LA COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE OU L’AMOUR JOUÉ, 1996
PUBLIC HOUSING, 1997
BELFAST, MAINE, 1999
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, 2001
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE 2, 2002
LA DERNIÈRE LETTRE, 2002
THE GARDEN, 2004
STATE LEGISLATURE, 2006
LA DANSE - LE BALLET DE L’OPÉRA DE PARIS, 2009
BOXING GYM, 2010
CRAZY HORSE, 2011
AT BERKELEY, 2013
CREDITS

USA / 2013 / 244’ / HD / COLOR / DOCUMENTARY

Director, Sound, Editor FREDERICK WISEMAN
Image JOHN DAVEY
Mix EMMANUEL CROSET
A production of BERKELEY FILM, INC.

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