

HONORARY GRADUATE

Michael Mervyn Katz

Michael Mervyn Katz has a secure place as one of the most brilliant legal minds ever produced by the University of the Witwatersrand or by this country. The University's and South Africa's great good fortune has been that throughout his career Michael Katz has given unstintingly of himself, and his truly formidable ability, in the service of his alma mater and his country.

Born on 16 October 1944 in Johannesburg, Professor Katz matriculated with a first-class pass from Roosevelt High School at the end of 1961. The following year, he began to read for a Bachelor of Commerce degree - the start of what were to be six very distinguished years of study at this university. This period ended in 1967 when he obtained a Bachelor of Laws degree with distinction and won the Society of Advocates' Prize as the most distinguished law graduand in that year. Michael Katz was the recipient of numerous other prestigious scholarships, prizes and medals during his BCom and postgraduate LLB years. In 1969 he was awarded a National Postgraduate Scholarship and proceeded to Harvard University to read for a Master of Laws degree. His experience at Harvard was an extremely rich one and he took full advantage of it. It left a lasting impression on his entire approach to the law. He has recounted, for example, his initial shock when a fellow student, sitting with his chair tilted back and sandalled feet on his desk, contradicted a lecturer, and then engaged the lecturer in argument for forty minutes, and how shock turned to a realisation of how much he was learning from the exchange.

On his return from the United States, Michael Katz resumed his professional career as a practising attorney with the firm Edward Nathan & Friedland Incorporated. Today he is the senior partner of the firm. In the legal and accounting professions, as well as in the business community and in government circles, Professor Katz has an awesome reputation as a commercial lawyer of the very best kind. Nor is his reputation confined to this country alone. His opinion is constantly being sought and he is in great demand as a speaker at conferences both here and abroad. He is an Honorary Professor at this university and an Extraordinary Professor at both the University of Pretoria and the University of the Orange Free State. He is a phenomenally busy practitioner whose list of clients reflects his immense stature within his field of expertise. Not surprisingly, he has been invited to be a director of numerous companies. His capacity for work is legendary and he is rumoured not to need sleep at all, a claim which he says is 'exaggerated'.

Professor Katz has always been imbued with an ethic of service. Very early in his professional career, in 1972, he began to lecture part-time at Wits, first in the Graduate School of Business Administration and then, from the early 1980s, in the School of Law. In the Business School, his students were graduates who came from a variety of different fields. Typically, they were mature persons with a good deal of experience in the world of work. His lectures to these students were often a high point in their intellectual development, and an experience which they recall with pleasure today. In 1982 the School of Law introduced a Higher Diploma in Company Law and appointed Professor Katz as the course director. He has developed it into a highly successful course in which the best in present thinking on the subject, locally and internationally, is critically examined and debated from both a multidisciplinary and a practical perspective. This course, too, offers students a transforming and exhilarating learning experience.

The economic development of South Africa depends to a considerable extent on the quality of its legal system, and its system of commercial law in particular. It is difficult to think of any individual who has done more than Professor Katz to ensure that the country's system of commercial law is continually developed to meet this imperative. He is probably best known publicly for his role as Chairman of the Commission of Inquiry to Investigate the Taxation System of South Africa. In the field of taxation, he is also the Chairman of the Tax Advisory Committee that makes recommendations to the Minister of Finance and he was a member of the Margo Commission which had conducted an earlier investigation into the country's taxation structure. In the field of company and securities law he has made an enormous

contribution. He has been a member of the Standing Advisory Committee on Company Law since its inception in 1974, and has long played a decisive role in its deliberations and work. He is a member of the Securities Regulation Panel and also recently chaired a committee the report of which preceded fundamental changes in our stock-exchange laws. He has also influenced the development of our company law through his teaching and stimulation of research in this university's Higher Diploma in Company Law, and by some significant published writing within the field.

What has been said does not nearly exhaust Professor Katz's contribution to the public good in this country. He was a member of the State President's Economic Advisory Council and Chairman and President of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. He is a member of the Pensions Advisory Committee and the National Advisory Board of the Department of Correctional Services. He has been appointed to the Board of the National Housing Finance Corporation Limited, established by the Government to facilitate the delivery of affordable housing, and to the Board of Ntsika Enterprise Promotion Agency, established by the Government to promote small business.

The legal profession, this university and the country have much to be proud of when we honour Michael Mervyn Katz by conferring upon him the University's highest honour, the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.