

The Hon Justice James Jacob Spigelman AC

The degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) was conferred upon The Hon Justice James Jacob Spigelman at the Law ceremony held at 9.30am on 28 May 2004.

Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present the Honourable James Jacob Spigelman AC, Lieutenant Governor and Chief Justice of New South Wales for the conferring of the degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa).

His Honour is one of our University's most distinguished and esteemed alumni with an immense record of academic and professional achievement matched only by his long record of public service and community involvement. Truly and rightly, he may be acclaimed as one of the leading citizens of Australia.

James Spigelman was born in Sosnowiec, Poland in 1 January 1946 and arrived in Australia with his family in 1949. He attended Maroubra Public School and Sydney Boys High School. He came to Sydney University in 1963. He was an extraordinary student. He completed his Arts degree with first class honours in both government and economics in 1967. He then went on to study law and graduated with first class honours and the University Medal in 1971.

Throughout these years, James Spigelman was active in student life and community affairs. He was a leader in the legendary Freedom Ride in 1965 by students to highlight the deprivation and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal communities in NSW. He was President of the Students' Representative Council in 1969 and the Student Fellow of the University Senate from 1969 to 1971.

James Spigelman was admitted to practice as a solicitor in 1972 when he was Senior Adviser and Principal Private Secretary to E G Whitlam who was elected Prime Minister in December that year. He served Prime Minister Whitlam until 1975 when he was appointed the Secretary of the Department of Media – the youngest person to be appointed to the highest level of the Commonwealth Public Service.

James Spigelman was admitted to the NSW Bar in 1976 and commenced practice three years later after serving for several years as a Member of the Australian Law Reform Commission and having a period overseas, especially in the United States, researching for a book on the nuclear industry. This became the "The Nuclear Barons" which was published in 1981 with His Honour as co-author.

His Honour Justice Spigelman had a swift rise at the NSW Bar practicing in constitutional law, administrative law and appellate work. His Honour was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1986. Spigelman QC frequently appeared for the Commonwealth Government and the NSW Government in major cases and was acting Solicitor-General of NSW in 1997.

During these years, Justice Spigelman maintained his great interest in the arts, serving as the Chairman of the Australian Film Finance Corporation (1990-92), Deputy Chairman of the Art Gallery of NSW (1983-88) and President of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (1995-98). His Honour is also a member of the Council of the National Gallery of Australia (1995-98), a member of the Board of the Brett Whiteley Foundation (1995-98) and, earlier, as a Councillor of the Australian Film and Television School (1975-78).

James Spigelman was appointed Chief Justice and Lieutenant Governor of NSW in 1998 and in 2000 became a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) for services to law and to the community.

In judgments, speeches and papers, he has made a notable contribution to public understanding of the role of law and justice in the contemporary social order. His judgments have been notable in several important areas of law. In his role as Chief Justice he is rightly considered both the intellectual and administrative leader of the judiciary in NSW. A recent unique contribution has been his Becket lecture series on the 12th century conflict in England between Henry II and Thomas Becket, culminating in his murder by Henry's followers in Canterbury Cathedral. Next week, Cardinal Pell launches His Honour's book, based on these lectures which are the product of a life-time interest in Thomas Becket.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws, judge, scholar, administrator, educator and Patron of the Arts, the Honourable James Jacob Spigelman AC, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.