



## **Transcript of Commencement Speech at Tennessee State University by Jesse Russell**

**Jesse Russell:** Thanks for those generous and kind remarks; You made my life's journey sound much better than I remembered it; Growing up near Pearl High School!

To Dr. Shields, Our President; who has served this great institution with a strong commitment to keeping Tennessee State University on the path of excellence through results; Thanks for showing your commitment to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics by selecting the 2012 Commencement Speaker from the Technology Community.

To members of the Board of Regents, faculty, staff, friends, and the graduating Class of Spring 2012; Thank you for allowing me to join with you in the celebration of this Commencement.

I would also like to recognize my wife, Amanda, for her strong support of me and one of my passions which is providing Advice and Direction to young African American and Hispanic American youth in some of our most challenged inter-city communities; similar Advice and Direction as I received during my formative years in Nashville and also while at Tennessee State University which was "WHAT YOU EARN IS BASED ON WHAT YOU LEARN".

I would also like to thank my family members from Nashville that are here today and my mother, who is not, but would have loved to celebrate this special occasion with me. My thanks to her is for letting me live my dream of becoming an engineer as opposed to her dream for me, to become a leader in the church; which is why I stand before you today.

Let me start by congratulating you the Class of 2012 on your great success! You did it! A Great Start! I know that many of you, both graduates and parents, have been waiting for this day for many years.

This is a significant milestone in your life journey that needs to be savored and enjoyed. This exact moment will never happen again-so enjoy it.

It's an honor to be back at TSU, addressing this graduating class. In some ways, today, for me, is about coming home. I was sitting in one of those chairs "almost forty years ago" thinking of my future and what it would be like; because I knew that once I crossed this stage that my journey as an engineer would start and I could not wait!

So as I look out over this Class, it is both humbling and inspiring and brings back special memories; because I know that there are those of you that can't wait to cross this stage such that your professional life's journey can begin, therefore, I will be brief!

I strongly believe that: "YOU CAN SHAPE YOUR FUTURE OR YOU CAN BE SHAPED BY THE FUTURE" and as such "THINGS DON'T JUST HAPPEN FOR YOU, YOU MAKE THINGS HAPPEN FOR YOU."

To those of you that have heard me speak around the country can surely attest to how proud I am to be the "Boy from Tennessee State University" that had a dream of being an engineer in one of the most renowned technology research institutions in the world, "Bell Laboratories", at a time when Blacks were not readily accepted in that institution.

Therefore, it goes without saying how much I love this University for providing me with a nurturing environment where I was free to develop the self-confidence necessary to challenge the status quo with respect; and live my dream of being an engineer at "Bell Laboratories."

As I stand before you and reflect on a meeting in Bell Labs among an all-white group in 1984, where the "Boy from Tennessee State University" had the self-confidence necessary to challenge the teaching of the Bell System of putting phones in places; And raised the question of "Why Not" focus on putting phones on people verses putting phones in places, which gave rise to Digital Cellular Technology and ultimately the Digital Cellular Industry.

As I view the many young and optimistic faces in this graduating class, my hope for you is simple, that you have developed the same self-confidence, here at Tennessee State University, as I did almost 40 years ago to challenge the status quo, with respect and to have the courage to ask the question "Why Not?" as you shape your future.

It is your young and inquisitive minds combined with the courage to ask the question "Why Not?" that perhaps holds the innovative solutions to the various challenges that we face as a community, as a nation, and as a global society.

As America faces some of the most difficult Global Competitive Challenges of our time and as she seeks to lead the free world in innovation; America needs you to join and lead the movement in re-establishing America's preemies in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). It's this STEM Movement which will also re-establish America preemies in education and innovation.

During my travels, there have been two experiences that have touched my life in a special way which has inspired me to reach out to our youth, one at a middle school in the United States and the other in South

Africa. Because these two experiences so impacted my life, I would like to share them with you. Let me start with the United States middle school experience which took place during Black History Month.

I was giving a talk on Black Inventors and Patents to a gathering of 5th and 6th graders and was showing them an example of one of my patents with my name on it. One of the 6th grade African American students raised her hand to ask me a question, "Are You an Inventor?" my response was "Yes" and this is one of my patents. She responded by saying "I thought All Black Inventors were Dead". As I looked into her eyes, during that brief encounter I cannot say for certain that she was inspired to become an inventor, but what I can say is that the books of knowledge for her at that moment can live! The books we use to expose our young children to knowledge have an impact! We should be careful and select them wisely because they could change the direction of our children's lives.

As I thought about her statement, it was very disturbing to me, because like her, the only inventors that I learned about in school were Dead. However, as I listened to her I realized that after all these years nothing with respect to the teaching about black inventors had changed. That experience inspired me to start publicly speaking about black inventors both past and present as role models for our youth during Black History Month. I hope you consider joining me in this effort! As a college graduate, you too can serve in the community as a role model.

I also hope this helps to explain, Why, I think it's so important for you to get involved in the STEM Movement as well as helping us to celebrate people of color both past and present that are and have been involved in the creation of innovations which have improved the quality of people's lives through the utilization of advanced technologies as well as enabling America to be a leader in innovation. In 2008, America ranked number one in the world in innovation. Today, America ranks number eight. If we don't recognize and celebrate people of color in the innovation fields as role model for our children, then who will? Why should we deny children in our community this potential career path because we are not willing to put our technology innovators on the same pedestal as our athletes and entertainer?

To allow our educational system to selectively educate our children is not something that I think you would agree with, because, we are a better American than that! Parents and graduates; Get involved in the Education of Our Children during their formative years, because their future and the future of our community is at stake. Take the time to put all of our role models on a pedestal for our children; given exposure and information, they will make intelligent decisions regarding their future.

In the interest of time, let me just briefly share the South Africa experience. Being the first Black Engineer in America to be selected as the most outstanding young electrical engineer of the year and sometimes; referred to as "The Boy from Tennessee State University" that dream of being an Engineer at Bell Labs "And; the Dream came True."

Someone at AT&T thought it would be a good idea for me to travel to South Africa and share my story. I was requested to speak at one of the school's for blacks which reminded me of my experience in Nashville in the 50's and 60's where I also was only allowed to go to school for Blacks.

As I was speaking, there was a young girl that just stared intently at me during the whole speech and seemed to focus on every word that I said. Once the speech was over she asked me a question, which was "How does it feel to invent?" At that moment, I could not respond to the question and started to cry. I think; I started to cry because for the first time in my life, I realized how lucky I was to live in a country with all of our challenges; where you could start out at the bottom of our society and still achieve your life's dream through hard work and perseverance verses someone like her that could only imagine their life's dream with no hope of ever realizing it.

My message to you the class of 2012, you live in a country of enormous opportunities, don't let your dreams go unfulfilled, simply because you are not willing to put in the hard work and perseverance that will be required to realizing them. I would ask that you keep in mind that there are those, less fortunate than you; that can only imagine their dreams, with no hope of ever realizing them.

Let me change directions and share with the graduating Class of 2012 some thoughts that have guided my life, and I hope you will find them helpful as you commence the next phase of your life.

Let start with; ***The Pursuit of Excellence, which is a principle that I have used to guide my life: It's your life; commit yourselves to "Excellence in all of Your Life's Endeavors". If you pursue excellence with passion; money, power, and positions will pursue you. You Don't need to pursue it!***

Make the focus on excellence your brand name and reputation by engaging in the process of becoming an expert in your chosen field. However, you need to recognize that knowledge is increasing so rapidly—it is exponential. Also keep in mind that knowledge is weightless, a treasure you can always easily carry so study continuously. Remember, there are no short cuts to the fountain of knowledge, and it requires dedication and hard work. Don't assume that what you learned yesterday will meet tomorrow's challenges and needs.

Wireless Communication Technology and the Internet have changed the world in a profound way. I have spent most of my professional career in the wireless communication industry focused on advancing technology to move intelligence from one person to another faster, because I recognized that the longer it takes information to get from one person to the next; the less valuable the information will become!

As you know, we have seen an explosion in Cell Phone Apps, which has fueled the Smartphone Phenomenon. The question that everyone in the technology community is asking is what will the next

generation of Cell Phones be like? Let me suggest, What if the next generations of Cell Phones were handheld control devices that you simply point to a location in front of you and the holographic image of the person that you would like to speak with simply appears in front of you at that location. How would your life experience change? I will leave the creation of that technology to your imagination.

While, Apple has upped the game in the wireless industry with the creation of the Smartphone Phenomenon via the iPhone and IPAD; there are other companies. One example is our company incNETWORKS®.

This company is led by two graduates of TSU. The company is focused on creating the next generation of Broadband Private Cellular Networks, which are capable of moving wireless information at a speed of 100s of megabit within your home or office and ultimately replacing the need for wires in your home and office. This new "Small Cell" wireless networking technology will enable every home, business office and campus to own their own private cellular networks for such smartphone devices as iPhones and IPADS.

This new technology has the potential to create the next generation of Broadband Cellular Services which could make video as mobile as voice and text.

Your question at this point, might be, what does this have to do with committing yourself to the pursue excellence. It's simple.

Innovation like Excellence in Performance is Color and Ethic Group blind! Your challenge will be can you get the credit for your innovations and the recognition for your Excellence in Performance.

Let me take a minute and put this in context; in 1984, when I describe to our all-white Bell Labs team, how we could create digital cellular technology to revive the mobile phone industry and save their jobs, they quickly stopped focusing on me as the young African American Supervisor, but on my knowledge as an expert in digital signal processing.

Although, they were experts in analog technology, they had not expanded their knowledge base into digital technology, although they were fully aware that digital technology was replacing analog technology, but they lack the motivation to expand their background. What's the moral of this story? "NEVER LOSE YOUR DESIRE TO LEARN AND GROW". Because, you will also lose the Flexibility to "Control Your Future" and your destiny will be in the hands of others.

Next, let's discuss; ***A Life Long Passion for Learning which I think is the key to your professional growth and success. You should Commit Yourselves to a "Life Long Process of Expanding Your Intellectual Bandwidth" to the benefit of the world that surrounds you.***

What's the benefit to you? First, you must take the time to understand the unique value of your "God Given Natural Intellectual Bandwidth", but also remember that your true Intellectual Bandwidth is your Natural Intellectual Bandwidth raised to the power of your experience years. Keep in mind that there are those that came before you that have the potential to impart the learning of experience to you.

Although, I believe that a touch of arrogant never hurt anyone, but don't let your touch of arrogant place you among those individuals that feel that they must plow every new field of life's challenges on their own. Remember you have a choice, you can learn from your own life experiences over time or you can reach out to those who have already plowed life's field of challenges for advice, guidance, and wisdom. That is your responsibility, not those around you.

Let's examine; ***The Value of Character in Life's Journey, which I think defines your destiny.*** **You should commit yourselves to the "Goodness in life Towards Others" because values and principles in Life Matter.**

As I age and reflect on my life and the life principles that my mother tried to teach me, I now understand the value of them; I also now understand that you only go around once in life and there is no practice run! It is critical to understand that the choices you make today, tomorrow, and the day after have consequences on your life and legacy. I believe God select this time and place for you to be here, because "You Matter."

Don't let a day go by without thinking about how you can positively impact the lives of those around you that are less fortunate than you. How much time can it take to extent a helping hand or a kind expression of hope, given, the time that we live in!

Now, let's discuss Life's most Challenging Quest; ***The Pursuit of Economic Freedom: You should commit yourself to Economic Freedom early in life based on creating a legacy of wealth such that descendants of yours and descendants of theirs benefit from your life's work. "Learn how to make money work for you and your family."***

Many of you have earned your education with other people's money, blood, sweat and tears. In some cases you may have also used student loans, scholarships, grants, prayers, and many years. I am sure that many of you have your sights set on getting a good job. Others may be focused on starting your own business—creating good jobs. In either noble case, learn how to make the money you earn work for you.

Now that you have more education than you've ever had; use it to help you make more money than you've ever had and gain economic freedom. This is great to say, but what does it mean. It means that your money works for you when you invest it or save it and receive a return on the investment or saving that exceeds the rate of inflation.

What's important to remember is that you will never attain wealth without investing some of that hard earned money you receive each payday.

Therefore, you need to put a personal business plan together based on how much money you need to meet your style of living and make sure that you make more money than you need for that life style and learn how to invest or save any money that you have beyond what's required to meet your life style.

This sounds pretty simple. So, what is the problem? The problem is: the more money you make; the more you change your life style! Therefore, you must decide that tomorrow is the first day of your new path to gaining economic freedom and as such you need to first set a life style that make you happy and stick to it. Although, attaining wealth may not be one of your life goals....gaining economic freedom should be!

When you have financial independence, you have the option of choosing the employment that makes you happy rather than the employment that you need to meet your financial obligations. If you love what you do, as they say, you'll never work a day in your life! Class of 2012, set your goals wisely and you will achieve them!

In closing, remember, "You only go around once in life and there is no practice run!" Be honest with yourself and remember to commit yourself to "NEVER LOSING YOUR DESIRE TO LEARN AND GROW."

Congratulations on your graduation and may God bless the paths that you take.