

# 'Controversial' student leader speaks at WSSU

BY T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

## NABSG president encourages students to be proud of blackness

You didn't have to sit in on Lewis Thomas III's brief lecture last week at Winston-Salem State University to get a sense of his views and ideas.

The list of books he gave to the audience at the end of his address pretty much summed up his philosophy for life.

The list included: "The Miseducation of the Negro," "They Came Before Columbus," "Invisible Man" and "The African Holocaust" - books he says no true Afrocentric thinker would be without.

Thomas, the president of the National Association of Black Student Governments, brought his provocative message of self-respect, unity and self-empowerment to WSSU as part of a nationwide speaking tour, a tour he hopes will enlighten young minds and help him form alliances with some student governments that have taken issue with his style and manner of leadership.

Thomas' half-hour speech integrated aspects of history in a rapid-fire, sermon-like address. He talked extensively about the so-called "contradiction of philosophies," a state that he says many blacks find themselves in as they try to find a common ground between their African past and the everyday realities of African American life.

The philosophies are constantly dueling, Thomas said.

"We must be aware of who we are and where we are today," Thomas told a crowd made up of about 60 students.

While discussing the "confusion" that he sees among many young black males, Thomas turned his attention to the world of rap, and its glorification of the hatred of women and violence. While many see rap as seemingly just lyrics over a thriv-

ing beat, Thomas said the messages in the music should be taken very seriously.

"Brothers find it easy to rap about murder and we find it easy to dance as rappers rap about murder," Thomas said, laughing at the scenario.

"No matter how much we believe the lyrics are unimportant, they represent the state of blacks at this time."

In some cases, the rap movement has led some down a path of ignorance rather than toward knowledge and enlightenment, he said.

Thomas said some African American women have let the music brainwash them into thinking that a well developed body is a better investment than a well developed mind, and some black men have snatched the "gangsta" persona from the art form and made it a way of life.

"They don't know what a gangster or a thug really is," he said. "If they were real gangstas, they would own property. If they were real gangstas, they wouldn't let people come into their communities and kill."

NABSG includes nearly every historically black college and university in the nation. Thomas was elected president in September at the group's annual meeting in Atlanta.

Thomas talked openly about his past during his lecture. He grew up in Washington, D.C., where his parents often had to rely on public assistance as they struggled to make ends meet.

The Thomas family eventually overcame, with both his moth-

er and father earning college degrees, and moved to a Philadelphia suburb. Thomas said oftentimes when black people obtain a higher social rank, they forget the humble beginnings from whence they came.

"We tend to forget about the free cheese, the free peanut butter and all those beautiful things," Thomas said.

Thomas earned a bachelor's degree from Temple University at age 18; he is currently working on his second bachelor's degree in history and secondary education at Lincoln University.

Thomas stressed the importance of education and urged his fellow students to actively teach the youngsters that will come behind them.

"When we say we are African, it has to do with our state of mind. You must live your life by example. We need for you to realize your maximum potential, academically, spiritually and otherwise," Thomas said.

Though Thomas has raised more than \$200,000 for NABSG and was instrumental in planning the International African Youth Leadership Summit, which will be held in Washington March 16-19 and feature the likes of Minister Louis Far-

rakkhan and entertainer Lauryn Hill, he has come under fire from some SGA presidents who think he is too radical.

He has also been roundly criticized for his connection to Farrakhan; Thomas' relationship with the controversial Nation of Islam leader stretches back for years. He is Farrakhan's godson and Thomas' father was once a top official with the Nation of Islam. Thomas said Farrakhan contributed \$5,000 toward his speaking tour.

"He has contributed to my development. I have a personal

relationship with him. I will retain a personal relationship with him," Thomas said bluntly. "I will not allow anyone to push us around. I will not allow anyone to push our vision around."

Mataryun Wright, WSSU's student body president, did not attend either of the two lectures Thomas presented at the school. During his lecture, Thomas said that two SGA presidents in North Carolina are not supportive of him; he hoped that his trip to the state would help alleviate some of the tension.

When asked whether Wright

was supportive of him, Thomas deferred the question to Wright.

Several calls to Wright were not returned by press time.

Thomas said he will continue to work on behalf of HBCUs everywhere. He described himself as a "warrior" for the cause and urged others to fight for the preservation of HBCUs.

Thomas envisions a day when NABSG will be so strong that it will be able mount instant protests and demonstrations whenever a court or politician challenges the integrity of HBCUs.

"What we seek is power," he said. "The movement is still moving."



Thomas

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### Parks

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IRS documents to investigators in Lansing, Gorton told the newspaper.

The license is good until July 2000.

The institute's IRS disclosure forms, which are required to be filed by April 15, were not signed until Dec. 1, three days after the fund-raiser.

The organizers of the fund-raiser said they don't know if the event will raise enough money to get the charity out of trouble. A similar fund-raiser nine years ago in Washington, D.C., lost \$70,000.

Institute supporters acknowledge that the organization has had problems, but they vow that they will take a more active role in watching over the charity's finances.

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