

2007 IOWA BROWN AND BLACK FORUM
EVENT DATE 12/01/07

Live from North High School in Des Moines just one month before Iowa voters go to caucus to pick a democratic candidate for president. They are all here on one stage. Clinton, Edwards, Revell, Kucinich, Richardson, Biden and Obama. Talking tonight about immigration and civil rights, education and health care.

They better come prepared, these candidates will have to answer to some questions.

A last chance to make their case. And to make a move. HDNet presents the Iowa Brown and Black Presidential Forum. Now live from Des Moines here is Dan Rather.

DR: (2:25) Good evening from a very cold and snowy Des Moines, Iowa and welcome to HDNet's coverage of the Sixth Brown and Black Forum. We are coming in from inside North High School what you are seeing now is outside the high school where various demonstrators for the different candidates are shouting their slogans holding up their signs, beating their drums and so forth. It will be a capacity crowd inside. The forum will take place just behind me in the school's auditorium. On January 3rd just a little over a month from now Iowans will caucus to register their preferences for presidency. In the current wide open race the Iowa caucuses figure to play a key roll in setting the tone for what's to come. This is especially true for the democratic candidates. Seven of whom are with us tonight. Now for the record the forum has repeatedly asked republican candidates to participate and they have declined. But this history making democratic field which includes an African American, a Hispanic Latino and a woman running for the highest office in the land. Tonight presents an opportunity to address questions of particular concern to voters of minority racial heritage. And in a nation where persons of minority racial background make up now one third of the overall population the issues explored tonight are of importance to all Americans.

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Foreign policy questions, Iraq, Iran, what to do about terrorism have often grabbed the headlines but expect domestic policy to get plenty of attention this night. Questions of race and poverty. So long staples of American politics but which to often get unaddressed in today's campaigns along with such key issues as immigration and health care. Tonight's even has become a must do for the democratic candidates. The Brown and Black Forum has become a major quadrennial event here in Iowa and this years field of candidates will be answering questions and addressing issues to an audience that represents the increasing diversity here in the heartland of America. Iowa turns out is changing to look like much of the rest of the country. HDNet's Marla Tellez has that story.

MT: (4:38) Thanks Dan. The statistics may surprise you. Many Americans have the impression that Iowa is a wide homogenous place but there is a sizeable African American population and the challenges they face are a microcosm of the problems blacks face nationally. They are incarcerated at disproportionately high rates. Black high school students are suspended and expelled more than any other group. Many African Americans are actually losing hope. A new pole shows that nationally almost 80% of black's life is the same if not worse than it was five years. Less than 50% believe life will get better in the next five years. This is a turnaround from the 1980s when 40% of blacks said that their lives were improving and nearly 60% were optimistic that their futures would be better. For the large still and growing Latino population immigration is one of the central issues. There have been raids at company's employing immigrants and in some towns a backlash against what is perceived to be a flood of new residents. And poverty is an enormous problem. In 2005 the state wide

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poverty rate was about 11%. For Latinos almost 26%. Issues like these form the backdrop for the coming Iowa caucus and tonight's forum. So it's no wonder that the forum is held at North High School in Des Moines a racially mixed inner city school.

(6:10) So they could have picked really any high school to do the forum do you think that North High is a good representation?

(6:16) I think so. To have the Black and Brown Forum here like something for minorities cause we are so diverse like we have a lot of different types of people here. So I think it's a very good representation.

MT: (6:27) We sat down last month with five kids to get their take. What matters to them and what they would like to hear from the politicians that they'll see up close.

Meet Carissa, Ahn, Laura, Juan and Marissa.

(6:43) My boyfriend was trying to pass out Obama flyers he's like down to earth I think. I haven't seen no one else talk like Hillary or something but he was one that I was really interested in.

MT: (6:55) This will be the first presidential election these kids will get to vote in.

They are all getting registered for caucus.

(7:02) And what about the idea of voting is that something that excites you? How does that make you feel?

(7:06) Yea it really does excite me just because I'm 18 I finally like my opinion and my voice finally matters and I can put it on a ballot and send it in and say this is who I want, this is who I pick. So I've always been too young to anything and now that I'm 18 I can finally do something that is going to matter.

(7:22) When did your parents come from Vietnam.

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(7:25) We came like seven years ago.

(7:26) So that must be really satisfying to for you then have come here from Vietnam and now you are going to be 18 and you can take part in the political

(7:36) My opinion actually is going to be something like can make a difference in America.

MT: (7:43) They say the racial and gender diversity among the democratic candidates is a refreshing change.

(7:49) There is a black man, a Hispanic, a white woman.

(7:54) I think its great because like we've had rich white men like all the time you know like I think we need a president that can relate to everybody. Who went through the things that people went through in America like there's not every citizen here is a rich white man. So I think we just need something different. We're a different country now.

(8:20) As a minority in Iowa are there issues that you want them to address?

(8:24) Basically immigration. I don't know what I want them to do basically they are coming here because they want a better life. For me it's like hard to hear like they want. They want us out of here and I know we did go into the country illegally because that is what my parents did but I don't know I think they need to be open minded. Think of all those people that are trying to work.

(8:53) There are actually minorities who work the jobs that Americans like don't want no work. Some of them is like cleaning up at the hospital. My mom used to work at a hospital. Whenever she works, whenever she comes home her and my grandma they are always hurting their back by leaning down cleaning I mean it was hard. And

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there are no Americans going to do that. And what if we get sent back I mean American won't be America anymore.

MT: Education is another big issue for these college bound seniors.

(9:26) How are you planning to pay for college?

(9:28) Hopefully I get enough scholarships and if not just getting loans and paying them back later on in life. Education is getting really expensive like going to college and I know that's one of the big issues that's going on right now. They are trying to make it cheaper and that will really like effect me in the future now like how much I have pay, how much more I have to pay, how much less and it's like it would be really good to see it less.

MT: (9:58) Of all the things we discussed there were two issues these kids feel most passionate about. First the War in Iraq.

(10:06) Do any of you here have somebody fighting in the war.

(10:10) My friend she goes here her brother is in the war and she scared a lot when she hears the news about what's happening over there.

(10:18) Any my teammates my former teammates they graduated last year. They signed up for the Marines Reserve.

(10:24) So it's very real for you then.

(10:25) Yes. They were my friends. They said that why they did it in the first place because they regret doing it.

(10:33) There is a lot of students from North that are being shipped out to Iraq. But like for me it does make a difference because I think its just like its so stupid that we are out trying to fix somebody else's country when our own country is still like messed

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up. New Orleans is still messed up from Katrina and that was what two years ago?

Why are we in Iraq? Like I don't understand why we are fighting over there. Like why are we losing our families over this.

MT: (11:03) And the other issue they experience on a personal level. Health care.

(11:10) About the reason why I have health insurance is because we have a low income and like it's sucks for a lot of people who do have good jobs but they still can't pay health insurance. My mom doesn't have health insurance. So even when she gets sick she can't go to the hospital.

(11:26) It's my brother and his kids that don't have health insurance and it's hard. My brother was out of job and when they are sick you have to take them no matter what and you have to pay for it even though you don't have, it's very expensive.

(11:42) So then health care must be a priority for you in terms of what the next candidates.

(11:48) Yea I really care about health care. And I think everybody should have health insurance no matter what.

(11:54) I think health care is very important in and everybody needs it and its ridiculous how much it can cost knowing that every American, every citizen no matter where they are need health care and they all get sick and they need taking care of so I think it should be affordable knowing that it's a universal thing that everybody's going to need. It doesn't have to be free but just affordable. Just so everybody can take advantage of it.

MT: (12:14) Strong beliefs, smart ideas. From smart young minds. Ready for their first election.

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(12:20) A show of hands if you can go, are you guys going to attend the Brown and Black Forum?

MT: (12:29) They will be joined by voters from all across Iowa tonight for an event that can't help but influence who wins the democratic nomination. Dan.

DR: (12:38) Thanks Marla. We are now joined by the distinguished governor of Iowa Chet Culver. Who was Secretary of State in this state for two terms before becoming governor. Governor Culver is a democrat who has a special concern about high school graduation rates and renewable energy. Welcome Governor. Glad to have you here.

CC: (12:57) Great to be with you Dan. Thanks for being in Des Moines tonight.

DR: (13:00) Well it's always a pleasure to be in Des Moines even though the weather turned a little rough today. Governor, what are you looking for out of this forum tonight that we haven't heard in previous forums or "debates"?

CC: (13:11) Well I think it's very important for the presidential candidates to focus on diversity. That talk specifically about issues that relate to the African American and Latino communities that's what the Brown Black Forum has historically been all about and I think Iowans and the rest of the nation deserve to hear how these candidates stand on some of these tough issues and I'm excited to be here. It's kind of fun to watch as opposed to being in the middle of the battle. I just got elected last November and I'm honored that so many have decided to be here for this important night.

DR: (13:47) Well I'm noting that your father was a previous governor of Iowa and had a reputation of being one of the better governors in the nation. About renewable energy if you could ask one question of these candidates tonight about renewable energy what would it be?

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CC: (14:00) I think what are the question is what are we going to ask Americans to do. Everyone is going to have to be a part of what I've called this twenty first century energy expedition. It's going to take a coordinated effort, citizens in Iowa and across the nation are going to have to be a part of this. We're going to have to be more efficient obviously with energy. And I hope that congress and the next administration really makes a commitment in terms of setting very high benchmarks whether its related to reducing emissions or using more bio-fuels or using more wind that leadership needs to come from Washington and then once it does we will ask Americans and Iowans to be a part of that in a constructive way. They might mean buying for flex fuel vehicles I've urged Iowans to buy flex fuel vehicles to purchase E85 to purchase bio diesel as opposed to being dependent on Mideastern oil so the next president is going to have to call on Americans to help us solve this energy challenge in the future and I expect that any one of these democrats will.

DR: (15:11) Let's talk about graduation rates. Particularly among young men and women but principally young man in the minority communities. I know you have talked about this a lot but again if you could ask these candidates one question directed toward helping at least to solve this problem I think you have 46% drop out rate among African American young men in high school in this state what question would ask them?

CC: (15:34) Well this is an issue that's near and dear to my heart in fact I'm the only governor in the nation that's been in the classroom in the last twenty years. I have a masters in teaching. I taught right here in the Des Moines public schools a couple of miles from here at Hoover High School and so I've been on the front lines. I've been in the classroom with a 150 kids a day, six different classes, basketball before school,

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football after school. We need to give young people hope and opportunity. And it starts with early childhood education. We also have to give every child in America and Iowa a healthy start. If we can commit, if the next president can commit to giving every child in America health care and early childhood education we will solve half the challenge right there. On the other side of the equation we need to allow young people to go on to higher education. Unfortunately Iowa has ranked at the very bottom recently in needs based access to higher ed. That means based on income, we're shutting out way to many young Iowans and young Americans across the nation are finding a similar challenge because higher ed is so expensive. We have to make college more affordable. We've come up in Iowa with an all Iowa opportunity scholarship based not on merit but needs based. Based on income. We need to offer the kids when they get into the educational system at a young age and when they leave those types of opportunities and I am confident that these young kids given those important tools will succeed and thrive and be productive citizens and I expect these candidates to talk on about their plans, specifically related to college affordability, and early childhood education tonight.

DR: (17:21) And how are you going to pay for all of that? Outlined a number of things that need to be done willing to raise taxes to do that?

CC: (17:28) Well I think it's a matter of priorities. In Iowa we have a five billion dollar budget. We've decided that education is important. I didn't have to raise taxes last session but we gave our regions institution the highest amount of money ever. We came up with the all Iowans opportunity scholarship, we're expanding early childhood access across the state and we're going to be the first state in the nation to cover every

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kid when it comes to health care. It's a matter of choices. At that State house in Des Moines and at the Capital in Washington DC and it doesn't necessarily involve cutting taxes. It might or raising taxes, it might involve in closing some loopholes some corporate loopholes and the candidates have talked about that. The presidential candidates. So it's really a matter of having the commitment. And then asking Americans and Iowans to be a part of that vision.

DR: (18:24) I know you want to get inside the auditorium but democratic governor in a swing Midwestern state any chance you'll be on the ticket? Are you available for a Vice Presidential nomination?

CC: (18:34) You know I love being the governor of Iowa. I am honored and privileged to be the 40th governor of this state. I'm enjoying the job. We're getting some things done. I expect there will be a few other names that surface before mine and I'm honored to serve the people of this great state and the opportunities here in Iowa are unlimited. We want to create in Iowa the Silicon Valley of the Midwest. We want to become the renewable energy capital of the country right here in this state. That's my plan, that's vision and it's probably going to take me a few years to make sure we get there.

DR: (19:11) Governor thanks for coming by. I really appreciate it.

CC: (19:13) Thank you. Welcome back to Iowa.

DR: (19:14) Glad to be back. Thanks so much. And now we want to introduce you to two very special people who are responsible for tonight's event. Bringing to the four issues that are important to people in minority communities has become job one for our two hosts tonight State Representative Wayne Ford and long time Iowa activist Mary

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Campos are tonight's co-chairs and founders of the Brown and Black Presidential Forum. I talked them awhile ago as they arrived inside in the auditorium. Talked to them about the presidential campaign, what they hoped for tonight at this particular event and also asked them what they want this to center on. What issues they believe have not had enough attention.

DR: (20:00) Well first of all thank you both for doing this. Ms. Campos what are your hopes for this forum. What do you hope to see and hear? How will it be different from other forums?

MC: I believe that the nation is going to be shocked to know that we do have the ability to change the country and that we have the population speaking of the Latino population that will be out in numbers to help us win an election.

DR: (20:28) Mr. Ford what issues are particular interest to people who belong to minority communities in the country, what do you hope to hear, what do you expect to hear here that hasn't been dealt with or dealt with very much at other forums.

WF: (20:41) Well Dan I was number in the over representation of blacks in prison. We are number one in suspension rate of black children. If we can't deal with suspension rate and putting blacks in prison in the State of Iowa we're the fifth whitest state in America. How can we deal with the problems in New York or California? This is a very important forum.

DR: (20:59) Ms. Campos I hear people say all the time listen I don't pay much attention to the Iowa caucus and because the state is so ill representative of the country as a whole. Is that fair?

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MC: (21:08) I would say to them in the 14 year period of 1990 to 2004 Iowa saw 221% increase in Latino population.

DR: (21:18) And with the African American population Mr. Ford?

WF: (21:20) I think we had about 20,000. So without her people and my people and the rates that whites died in the state of Iowa there is no growth.

DR: (21:27) Mr. Ford why no republicans here?

WF: (21:29) Well me and Mary has always stuck our hand out for republicans

DR: (21:32) Invited them to come

WF: (21:33) Yes we have. Even before I became a State Legislator. For some various reason they said its not enough black republicans or Latino republicans in the state of Iowa so there is no reason to do this.

DR: (21:44) If you had one question to ask Ms. Campos what would it be of these candidates.

MC: (21:49) I would say to them being a politician and first of all I want to applaud them for being candidates. Because this is a hard life. And you know that and also I would say to them that I would ask them to search deeply in their soles and in their hearts answers that are trustworthy for us as a voting population.

DR: (22:14) Mr. Ford I'll try you if you had one question to ask of each of these candidates what would it be?

WF: (22:18) that is flashes back to you. In the late 60s I watched you on CBS news in Vietnam and you were the first individual to make America that blacks were dieing at a very wrong rate. I remember that show many years ago. We are in the middle of a 100 year war I believe and the question is since Brown and Black people and white females

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only fighting this war what we going to do in this country to make the country great?

And better.

DR: (22:39) Ms. Campos true or untrue that as things stand right now the republican assessment is that they may get more of the Latino vote in the overall election, not just in Iowa country but that there is no way they get a majority of the Latino vote do you agree with them:

MC: (22:53) I don't think that they will have that. What they are thinking that they are going to have because I think that Latinos will vote but we are a very cautious in the manner in which we vote.

DR: (23:11) And with voters who have African American heritage Mr. Ford? I hear republicans all the time say listen there is no way we are going to get 30-35% of that vote. True or untrue?

WF: (23:20) With that in the last election we had precess minority precess black and brown that increased their voting population from 10 to 400%. This is a close race. We got a _____ and a _____. Our forum will decide who will be the next president of this country. Or will be the democratic nominee.

DR: (23:38) I thank you both. I will see you along the trail after the broadcast.

WF: MC:(23:42) Thank you sir.

DR: (23:46) Wayne Ford and Mary Campos the founders of this Brown and Black Forum. We'll be back to Des Moines right after this break so stay here with us.

? (24:25) I see it's going to be crazy.

DR: (25:10) Former President Bill Clinton no surprise it was excepted although there was a time I thought the weather might prevent it from being here is in the hall.

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Someone passed by just a moment ago these are the words of this person not myself looked at me and said Elvis is in the hall referring of course to Former President Bill Clinton who is here. He will not be on stage tonight. He's part of the audience and no doubt will be part of _____ control for Hillary Clinton _____ later on. Moderating tonight's discussion are two distinguished journalists Ray Suarez is a veteran of more than 30 years in journalism his writing has appeared in major publications across the country perhaps he's best known for his work on public radio where he hosted talk of the nation and public television currently he is a senior correspondent for the News Hour on PBS and also moderating is Michelle Norris. She is an award winning journalist who hosts national public radio's popular program All Things Considered, she is also reported for ABC News, the Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times. Michelle is with us now she's inside the hall. Michelle well Ray is here as well. I told Ray that you might not be here. By the way speaking of not being here this gives me a good opportunity to point out that Former Senator Mike Revell of Alaska was not able to make it here tonight. He had been scheduled to be here but because of weather he is not going to be here so it will be all of the democratic presidential candidates minus one. Michelle tell me what your hopes are for this forum tonight?

MN: (26:41) Well I hope that we are going to have a discussion like you have not heard thus far on the many debates that we have already seen and heard in part because of the issues that we are going to talk about and in part because we are going to put issues of importance to people of color and we're going to try to have a very

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honest and open conversation about race, and about that very _____ question about whether demographics actually dictate someone's destiny.

DR: (27:07) Ray what are hopes for tonight?

RS: (27:09) Well you know Dan a lot of the questions that are going to be asked in the next couple of ours just aren't on the radar screen of most candidates forums that you will see if you turn into CSPAN or MSNBC or any of the other networks that have been running them. We're going to try to dig new ground tonight.

DR: (27:27) Michelle what are the rules that the candidates have agreed to at any point is any candidate allowed to ask a question of another candidate? My understanding somewhat different from most of these forums and alleged supposed debates previously but that will be possible. Explain that to us.

MN: (27:44) That's one of the things that actually distinguishes the Brown and Black Forum. The candidates can't ask a question of another candidate at anytime but there are particular moments where Ray and I will be calling on various candidates and they can pose a question directly to the candidate of their choosing.

DR: (28:02) And Ray the other questions some questions are to come from the audience right?

RS: (28:05) That's right. Tonight we'll have people who have been in contact with us beforehand and we'll bring them up and they'll get to ask a question along with a panel of distinguished experts.

MN: (28:17) And we should say we are in a high school auditorium some of the students here from North High will also be able to ask questions of the candidates.

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DR: (28:25) Well Michelle and Ray I know you are aware of the controversy that has developed rightly or wrongly over the last forum that was carried on CNN have efforts been made to ensure as much as possible that these are what I'll call honest questions and not planted questions?

MN: (28:42) Well in this case we've been in contact with all of the members of the audience and the panel that will be asking questions so we're quite confident that will not be the case.

DR: (28:53) And Ray in the all it's traditional these days for some candidates to try to "pack the hall, paper the house" what do we know about that?

RS: (29:01) Well I think this if you go by who's been coming through the front door and who has been heading for through the security barriers a lot of the candidates are very well represented tonight so we won't have cheering clap just for one or another but probably a lot of enthusiastic supporters of many if not all of candidates.

MN: (29:21) We've been advised not to cheer and clap we're going to see how that goes.

DR: (29:27) Michelle do you have one particular area or one particular question that you have in mind you say to yourself listen over this two hour period if we don't get to anything else I am determined we are going to get this and have these candidates speak up on it?

MN: (29:37) One of the things I'm hoping for is that we _____ issue of race on the table. It's something that we in America are very uncomfortable talking about. It's actually most honest discussions about race take place at the kitchen tables or on comedy stage where comedians are often very honest about that. We're hoping that we

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able to create the kind of atmosphere to our questions and to the discussions that we try to prompt where we will be able to talk about something that most Americans and certainly most people who are running for office aren't always comfortable talking about.

DR: (30:06) Well Ray you and I have been covering politics long enough to know that among the subjects, many subjects candidates rarely want to talk candidly about is the question of race and race in America. I think we understand why because on the one hand they are fearful if they do talk about it candidly that they will lose votes. So they tend to go into the side shuffle about race.

RS: (30:32) We're talking in an abstract and idealistic way rather than a real nuts and bolts way about how it affects life chances, how about different Americans end up in different places in this country because of race. That lives are really shaped by race. It's a hard thing for candidates to talk about I think as you suggest.

MN: (30:51) You know it's interesting if I can just add something Ray you know sometimes six different people can view the same thing. Whether it is a circumstance or a set of statistics or something that they see on the evening news. And they'll have a very different interpretation of that sometimes it's based on where they come from. Their perspective and so that's one of the things we hope to hear from candidates is based on who they are, where they came from. Their life experiences. How they view this issue and that.

DR: (31:17) Ray from your experience with the minority communities what is issue number one is equality of opportunity what is it?

RS: (31:27) I think a lot of the gaps. The gaps in health care, access to health care. The educational gaps. The gaps in income and accumulated family wealth. They are

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there they are persistent and too large to just be explained away by circumstances and they are never or rarely part of these campaigns.

DR: (31:46) Michelle Norris and Ray Suarez our moderators tonight for this forum in Des Moines the Brown and Black Forum let you get to your seats and we'll see as we go. Thanks a million. And our quality high definition coverage HDNet's coverage of the Brown and Black Forum from Des Moines will continue after this brief break.

(cheering)

(32:30) HDNet presents the Sixth Brown and Black Presidency (cheering)

(33:00) Ok. Right. Biden isn't going to make until 7:15 I don't know if they want you to mention that but. DR: I understand well we'll just swing with it a little bit. Ok. Right one minute max.

(34:00 cutting in and out talking)

DR: (34:22) Well we are a short time away from the start of tonight's forum. Notice we do not call it a "debate" because it isn't a debate by dictionary definition or otherwise so give them credit the people who put together the Black and Brown Forum they don't call it a debate as some others try to do with theirs and who knows tomorrow's newspapers and the television/radio coverage may speak of debate in Des Moines but it isn't a debate it is as it's advertised as a being a forum. Now we showed you pictures just a moment ago what's going on inside is the candidates have arrived on the stage keep in mind that Former Senator Mike Rivell of Alaska is not here because of difficulties getting in with the weather. The candidates by the way are seated on a draw. That is they drew for places so if you say to yourself well why did they put John Edwards at or near the middle of this it is he had a lucky draw this time around if you consider that a lucky

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draw. The obligatory photographs sort of class photographs are being taken now. Outside it's cold. Very cold. The temperature has been at or around freezing most of the day. There is a fairly heavy snow on the ground. Some of it will get frozen solid overnight and outside many of these young people students also a lot of adults there that beat the drums for their candidates. The outside contingents of the candidates seem to reflect the organizations and perhaps the money that the candidates have the more money the candidates have the more people they can get out and more signs. If you can Wayne Ford is addressing the audience of the auditorium now so lets pick up a little bit of what Mr. Ford is having to say.

(36:03) _____

(36:10) Well unfortunately he is speaking on the speaker in the auditorium so it's a little distorted so we won't be able to pick up what he says but primarily Wayne Ford an Iowa State Representative, a former high school football star in Washington DC has come out here to Iowa to make a name for himself he speaks with passion. He is now turning it over to Mary Campos the co-founder of the Brown and Black Forum. And to say inside the hall they can hear them very well the candidates are all mic'd up and you'll be able to hear them quite clearly. This sort of preliminary if you will was designed to be for the people inside the halls themselves. And we are just about ready to go I'm told. Running a little bit late but as things go remarkably on time. So it's now my privilege and honor to throw things inside to your moderators for tonight's Brown and Black Forum from Des Moines Iowa Michelle Norris and Ray Suarez. Take it away Ray and Michelle.

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(37:10) HDNet presents the Sixth Brown and Black presidential forum. Live from North High School in Des Moines Iowa. Now here are your moderators Michelle Norris and Ray Suarez.

(37:24) Right now we hear behind us the color guard.

MN: (40:18) Good evening. And Welcome to the Sixth Iowa Brown and Black Forum live on HDNet. I am Michelle Norris of National Public Radio's All Things Considered and I'm joined by my friend and fellow moderator Ray Suarez from PBS's News Hour with Jim Lehrer. For the next two hours we will be exploring vital issues of concern to African American and Latino voters. These are issues of course of vital concern to all Americans, invasions, civil rights, education, the economy and job opportunity.

(Spanish translation)

RS: (41:19) Now we are honored of course to be joined tonight by almost all of the eight democratic candidates for president here at Des Moines North High School their positions on stage were chosen at random from left to right. They are Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut, Senator Hilary Clinton of New York, Former United States Senator John Edwards North Carolina, Congressman Dennis Kucinich of Ohio we are expecting Joe Biden to arrive and when he arrives we will add him to the program but you should know around the country that this has been a tough weather day in Iowa and travel has been challenging to say the least. United States Senator Barack Obama from Illinois and Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico.

MN: (42:12) Well before we begin tonight. We would like to thank North High School here in Des Moines for hosting this event. We'd also like to acknowledge and thank the forums co-founders and co-chairs Iowa State Representative Wayne Ford and Mary

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Campos. Wayne and Mary thank you so much for inviting us to be a part of this extraordinary event. The first Black and Brown Forum was back in 1984 and since then it has grown both in prominence and in scope. It's now a force in both Iowa and National Politics this Forum is non partisan and all presidential candidates are invited to participate. However, no republicans accepted this year's invitation. And again if you are seeing an empty chair there we expect to be joined by Senator Joe Biden and Mike Rivell unfortunately was able to make it.

RS: (43:02) So before we begin a quick explanation of tonight's format and rules.

MN: (43:07) Ray and I will be asking questions as will four panelists who we will introduce shortly. We will also hear from some students from here at North High School and finally the candidates will have the opportunity to direct questions to each other. Candidates will have one minute for their answers and we will follow rebuttals as necessary. Follow with rebuttals as necessary. Also they will be one minute each. Ray and I will step in with follow-up questions when appropriate and each candidate will have the opportunity to make a one minute closing statement. So without further ado let's get started.

MN: (43:54) Now it is, it's like that old song Oh Baby It's Cold Outside. It certainly is cold and thanks to all of you for making the effort to be with us tonight I know that you had to travel through perilous conditions so though it's cold outside once we actually get started this evening I think I can say with a fair degree of confidence that it's probably going to warm up here inside the auditorium. We want tonight to focus on issues that are important of great importance to people of color but really issues that are important to all Americans. We want to talk tonight about race. Something that people are often

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uncomfortable talking about. We hope to put that on the table. We hope to wrestle with a very difficult question. Question that people still debate. The question of whether demography helps determine destiny. In the short time that I have been Iowa I have talked with many people and one of the things that I've heard over and over again in discussions particularly with people of color is the concern about the high incarceration rate for people of color particularly here in Iowa. So I just want to begin with a few statistics that will put this in perspective. If present trends continue one out of every three black male born today can expect to go to prison. 60% of the people in prison are racial or ethnic minorities. In every state in this country and that bears repeating. In every state in this country the percentage of blacks and Hispanics in prison exceeds the percentage of blacks and Hispanics in the general population. And right here in Iowa the incarceration rate for a black man is more than 13 times higher than for white man. That is the highest disparity in the country and that's right here in this state. My first question is to Former Senator John Edwards how would you as a candidate propose addressing criminal justice reform. Do you believe that it is something that is worthy of close examination and how would you do that? How would you try to reduce the prison pipeline without leaving yourself as a candidate or party vulnerable to the criticism that democrats are soft on crime?

JE: (46:07) Well Thank you and may I thank all of you for being here tonight and before I begin with that if I can just say to Senator Clinton and all the people who work for her how glad we are about the result of this terrible thing that happened in New Hampshire and we're proud of what you have done and proud of what your campaign done all of us recognize who are in these presidential campaigns these young people

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who devote their lives to change the country whoever, whatever candidate they are for so we are all very thankful for the result of what happened in New Hampshire. I think we have an enormous problem with our criminal justice system. To answer your question. You've just described the problem. Young African American men in many places in the country believe that all that the only thing that is going to happen to them is they are either going to die or go to prison. They believe they live lives of hopelessness, no chances whatsoever. That has to change. And I think there are a variety of things that we have to change. We have to change these mandatory minimum sentences, especially for first offenses. Non violent first offenses. We need to have alternatives to incarceration. Like drug courts for example. We need to get rid of the disparity between crack and powder cocaine which the sentencing commission has proposed doing but it's something that actually needs to be implemented into law. So there are a variety of things we need to do make this criminal justice system work. And can I just say one last thing. I know that we have time limits I don't want to go over them but the one last thing is we have to create an infrastructure for young people who have a brush with the law, who've grown up in a difficult environment to be able to turn their lives around. That means drug counseling and rehabilitation, alcohol counseling, and rehabilitation making certain they get job training, making sure that they get education so they don't go right back to the environment that got them into trouble to begin with.

MN: (47:46) Thank you. Thank you. I want to turn now to Senator Clinton if I could. I want to also reiterate Mr. Edwards statement was are so glad that you and your staff were safe. And we're also so glad that you made it here tonight I understand the travel

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conditions were very, very difficult. This question is posed to you. We just heard about the sentencing guidelines for crack versus the sentencing guidelines and the disparity for those who are convicted crimes involving crack cocaine and crimes involving powder cocaine. The US sentencing commission just took steps to try to limit those guidelines to close that gap. There is now a debate as whether those who were convicted days or even decades before the US sentencing commission made that change if this should be retroactive. If this should also apply to those who were convicted days and perhaps decades before this change was made. What is your view on that?

HC: (48:39) Well Michelle thank you and I am very grateful for the prayers and the good wishes. All of my friends here on the stage as well as Senator Biden called yesterday and we were very relieved at the way it turned out. I believe we've got to decrease the disparity that exists. It is really unconscionable that someone who uses five grams of crack cocaine or compared to 500 grams of powder cocaine would face such disparate sentencing. And it's further compounded because the possession of crack cocaine really is unique in the way that it leads directly to prison for so many people. So I am going to tackle the disparity. I think it definitely needs to be prospective on principal I have problems with retroactivity. I think that it's something that a lot of communities will be concerned about as well so let's tackle this disparity, let's take it on. The sentencing commission hasn't come forward yet with its specific recommendation but I'm looking forward to seeing it.

MN: (49:53) I need to talk to my good friend Ray but I'm going to do something very quickly just on the question of retroactivity a simple yes or no answer. Senator Dodd?

D: I'd be inclined to say yes on the retroactivity.

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MN: (50:02) Yes ok. Former Senator Edwards?

E: (50:04) I'm not inclined to say yes the answer is yes absolutely it should be retroactive.

MN: (50:10) Representative Kucinich?

K: yes.

MN: Senator Obama?

O:

MN: Governor Richardson?

R: I don't know.

MN: (50:21) That was clear. Ray?

RS: (50:23) Senator Dodd this week the administration proposed freezing the interest rates for a lot of sub prime mortgages around the country that are about to trend up in interest rates and when you pick up the paper everyday it seems like the home financing system in this country is having something close to a nervous breakdown and the burden of that lands disproportionately on minority home owners. But some are suggesting this isn't the fix. That merely freezing home rates for people who are in bad mortgages and can't get out just delays the reckoning that is surely going to come. How would you fix this? Do you agree with the proposal?

SD: (51:01) I think it's a pretty good idea in fact we made a similar suggestion I've been wrestling with this now since the last March and April when we first learned of the magnitude of the problem. Met with a lot of these stake holders to try to convince them to meet with their borrowers here to apply those kind of work out so people can maintain their presence in their homes. And the idea of freezing that rate either at that teaser

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rate these predators that drew people in would allow I think a couple of things to happen. One people to stay in their homes hopefully many of them but also the financial institutions their better off getting 3-4% back than nothing whenever foreclosures occur. So I'm inclined to like this idea. We're also working I would say Ray I'm trying to make sure this doesn't happen again. This was outrageous what went on here. The fact that there were no cops on the beat in this administration basically walked away from this and you have three times people of color in this country are being lured into sub prime lending. Many of them are eminently qualified for prime lending were drawn in the worst of all of those deals here. I hear brokers that frankly were not declaring who their financial relationship was with at all. Getting them to pay very high rates and then of course moving on and selling these things along in the market with no one being accountable. So we want to address the future problem but for those today in that situation I think frankly the idea of freezing will help. I just make one quick point as well here. It's not just the person in foreclosure if you take a square block in this country in a fragile neighborhood one foreclosure in that block will cause every other property to decline in value by \$3,000 to \$5,000 dollars within an hour of that foreclosure. So this problem is not just affecting those who were caught into a very bad deal but other neighborhoods again are going to be adversely effected and why it needs to be addressed promptly.

RS: (52:41) Senator Obama I'd like to move to you next. Just recently a report came out in the national newspapers that found that middle class black families were not able to carry their children into the American middle class. It's an astonishing number. Of children that grew up in middle class families had fallen out of the middle class and into

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poverty. Why do you think that happened and is there an appropriate role given what the constitutional description of the job of president is to do something about it beyond just saying that's terrible.

SO: (53:14) Is the mic on yet?

RS: (53:32) We are not taking away from your time Senator.

SO: (53:42) Do we have a hand out mic? I'm happy to use that. One of the reasons that I'm running for president is that the American dream has always meant that if you worked hard if you invested in your children then their lives could be better than yours. And that dream that so many generations fought for feels like it's slipping away. I think about my father in law. Who has now passed away. Here's is a man who at the age of 30 was stricken with Multiple Sclerosis. On the Southside of Chicago nevertheless was able to work as a municipal worker, had a good job, could have a house, was able to have health insurance, was able to send his children including my wife Michelle to college and they have achieved in ways that he would have never dreamed. That's been lost. Not just for African Americans increasingly but for all Americans. And so what do we need to do? We have to have a tax system that's fair. I will take away tax breaks from company's that are shipping jobs overseas and put tax breaks in the pockets of hardworking Americans who deserve it. We've got to invest in education. In a much more serious way and I put forward a plan to put 18 billion dollars a year in early childhood education, improving teacher's salaries, improving the infrastructure for our schools. If we can invest and understand that this is a crisis that doesn't just effect black and brown people but all of America I'm confident that we can make a big difference.

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RS: (55:19) Thank you Senator. Let's go next to Michelle Norris with the first of our candidate questions.

MN: (55:30) For those who follow the Brown and Black Forum you know one of the hallmarks of this event is that we allow candidates to ask other candidates questions directly and that first question is going to come from Senator Dodd. One of the hallmarks of the Brown and Black Forum (can you all hear me now)? One of the hallmarks of the Brown and Black Forum is that we allow candidates to ask other candidates questions directly. This evening that first question will come from Senator Dodd.

SD: (56:01) Thank you Michelle very much. Let me back in 2001 the congress passed I think one of the worst pieces of legislation along time the so called the Bankruptcy Reform Act I hear. My friends Senator Clinton, Senator Biden who is not here and Senator Edwards voted for that Bankruptcy reform bill, which drove a lot of people working class families into poverty, made it very difficult for them to manage their lives, to get back on their feet again. And so John I would like to ask you the questions you made a big issue of this issue of poverty, something you have dedicated your life to here could you explain to me why in the midst of that only five or six years ago you'd vote for a piece of legislation like that which did so much damage to so many families in our country?

JE: (56:42) Yea I was wrong. I was wrong and you were right Chris. I should not have voted for that bankruptcy bill it was a bad, bad piece of legislation. I think any of us who voted for it were wrong to have voted for it. I think there were some good provisions in it but I think on the whole when you look it at it actually did damage to low

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income families and working families in this country and as you have just pointed out you know it is the cause of my life to do something about 37,000 million people who live in poverty everyday in the United States of America. It will be the cause of my life as long as I'm alive and breathing and whatever we can do to strengthen low income families, to raise the minimum wage, to strengthen unions to organize in the work place, to get a national predatory lending law that cracks down on the very predators that you were speaking about earlier Chris, to allow kids to go to college who are willing to work when they are college. Those are the causes that I'm committed to and it is the cause of my life to do something about the issue of people who live in poverty, the homeless, the hungry we had 35,000 million of those last year and I'm completely committed to those causes and just to be clear on this issue you were right and I was wrong.

SD: (58:01) The only point I want to make I appreciate Johns' answer on that there were three votes. There was the vote in 2000 and then there were two votes in 2001. I appreciate you being wrong let me make it clear it was wrong three times and

JE: (58:11) But I didn't vote that way three times. I didn't vote that way three times. In any event that was wrong on the bill.

?RS: (58:21) Governor Richardson we live in a country today where Latino and Black household wealth, not income, but accumulated household wealth is about 10% for the average black and brown family of what it is for the average white family. And we've posted these statistics even during decades of very rapid economic growth where the GDP has been going up. The average household income has been going up, the average wage has been going up. Yet black and brown people in the United States are not able to accumulate wealth that can be passed on to children, that can be used to

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leverage other kinds of loans to borrow for education or starting a business how did we get here and how do we get out of it? A 90% gap.

GR: (59:31) People should bear with us and understand that when there are 10 live mics on a floor this a very difficult situation. Ok Dennis Kucinich let me throw you that same question and Governor you will have a chance to respond but Cleveland is a place where you can see this written in bricks and mortar, written in bank balances every day and it's a place where you were mayor and now serve as a congressman.

(59:59) No mic once again.

DK: (1:00:25) Boroco I want to thank you for passing the baton in this race. You are right about cities and like Cleveland and I see my good friend and sister Stephanie _____ Jones from Cleveland we face a situation where there is a massive amount of foreclosures, rising unemployment about around particularly around African American households and some Latinos. Here is my plan first of all. A full employment economy. A Roosevelt type WPA program that puts everyone who is able to work back to work with a living wage. Second a not for profit health care system. Where everyone in America is covered you know without any regards to paying premiums, co-pays and deductibles. Third, universal pre-kindergarten. So children age 3, 4 and 5 will have access to full quality day care funded by a 15% cut in the bloated pentagon budget. Four universal college education so our young people who are college age will be able to have a two and four year free public education funded by the government that spends the money into circulation. So we need to make economic reform the fundamental driving force in this country and a president percentage stands for the principal of a rising tide lifts all boats not trickle down economics. Thank you very much.

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RS: (1:01:51) Thank you Congressmen. We're going to take a quick break right now. Stay with us we'll be back shortly.

?: (1:05:14) We are at North High School in Des Moines Iowa for this years Brown and Black Forum we've had some audio problems and the whole point of a candidates debate is to let the candidates speak to the people so we are trying to work out a _____ and make sure that those candidates can do exactly that. Not only be heard in the hall but be heard across the country for audiences around the country along various cable networks. We have most of our candidates here. You should know that today was a really tough weather day in Iowa what they call sound nice wintry mix but actually it's a terrible, terrible thing, sleet, freezing rain and snow falling in rapid succession as the temperature went up and down throughout the day making travel treacherous on the roads for the candidates who were already in the Des Moines area and making it tough to fly into this area as well. So Senator Joe Biden of Delaware not yet able to join us. Senator Mike Rivell cancelled. All the other democratic candidates are with us here at North High School in Des Moines Iowa. Now you should understand with the Brown and Black Forum that all of the candidates from all the parties were invited. Only democratic candidates responded to this invitation.

RS: (1:09:03) Thanks for staying with us here at the Brown and Black Forum in Des Moines Iowa we are going to continue our program tonight with the candidates for president speaking to minority issues and we seem to have sorted out our audio problems and now I want to once again address Governor Bill Richardson who wasn't able to answer us earlier. But I am not sure yet if he's aware. No he's not aware yet that we're trying to begin again. Let's try to get some order in the house. Here we go.

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They want to get on with it too. And let's continue. Governor Bill Richardson let me give you a chance to answer that question about household wealth and what the president of the United States can do about it and what some of the causes are for these persistent gaps.

BR: (1:10:00) Well I said earlier I would be the real education president. I think the key is job and education. We're not talking enough about jobs in this campaign but education in my judgment is the key. I've outlined a 60 billion plan to make America education number one in the world again. This is what I would do. And the statistic you did not mention is that one out of two African American and Hispanic youth don't get through high school and that is a huge tragedy and there has been no improvement. Preschool for every child under four. You get to kids early. Full day kindergarten. Investments in science and math academies because we are 29th in the world when it comes to science and math. Art in the school programs and here at North High School I want to commend the drama department and all the great work that you do because I believe that having a strong art in the school program is going to make us more competitive in science and math. I'd get rid or no child left behind that is an impediment. And I would also have a minimum wage for our teachers at \$40,000 and let me conclude with this. National service. This is what I mean. College loans unaffordable. Rip off artists, banks, student loan companies, here is my plan. Two years in exchange, two years of government loans, the government helps pay for tuition, one year of national service by the student.

MN: (1:11:43) Sorry to cut you off there but we have many questions and many people who want to pose questions to you. We turn to now to our distinguished panel of

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community leaders. Try that one more time. I first express apology for cutting you off we have many questions and we have many people who would like to pose questions to the candidates. We will turn now to our distinguished panel of community activists our first question is going to come from Juan Andreotti is his the president of the US Hispanic Leadership.

JA: (1:12:11) Thank you Michelle. My question is to Senator Clinton in an editorial yesterday the Chicago Sun Times said "the bitter hostility aimed at illegal immigrants stems in great part from immigrant's failure to learn English". Believe me immigrants are trying hard to learn English as they should. But until they do would you be willing to use your command of the English language to help dispel the negative perception of illegal immigrants, undocumented workers that more and more Americans are beginning to have and if yes what would you say?

HC: (1:12:49) Well I am glad you asked that because I think this is one of the most important issues facing our country and I deeply regret the way the republicans are politicizing and demagogging this issue. If you listen to their debates they are trying to out do each other in basically demeaning and attacking those who are here in our country yes without documentation but who are often doing the work that keeps our family going and raising their families and making a contribution. The answer is comprehensive immigration reform. And I think we have to keep talking about that and keep working towards it and for me that's yes we've got to have tougher border security. We do have to crack down on employers who exploit and employee undocumented people. We've got to do more to help local communities bare the costs of it. Because they don't set immigration laws. We've got to do more with our neighbors to the south

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to help them create more economic opportunity for their own people but at the end of the day there has to be an earned path to legalization. And yes a long that path there should be every effort made to learn English. But we're not providing enough resources for programs to help people learn English so I intend to stand for and pass comprehensive immigration reform when I'm president.

MN: (1:14:15) Thank you Senator Clinton. Our next question comes.....

? 2004 we got a lot people registered to vote for the first time some millions of young people went to the poles, millions more are going to go in 2008 what can you say young African American and Latino men and women and others who often times feel locked out of the process? They feel as if nobody speaking to their issues. They feel as if nobody is listening to them. And one of the things that we've been able to do I think in this campaign and what we will continue to do is to encourage young people to mobilize, get registered, to vote and what you pointed the prospect of getting of bridging divides between African American Latinos is critical. Doctor King during the farm workers strike when Cesar Chavez was trying to organize farm workers wrote him a letter saying our cause is one. Our struggle is one. And we've lost that sense.