

Celebrating Our Singularity:

The History of Unmarried and Single Americans Week

by Thomas F. Coleman

September 19 – 25 is Unmarried and Single Americans Week. It is a time for 100 million adults to celebrate their civil status as unmarried Americans and for society to recognize the contributions that single individuals, unmarried couples, and single parents make as workers, neighbors, voters, taxpayers, family members, community volunteers, and friends.

Throughout most of the past decade, the Census Bureau has recognized the third week of September as Unmarried and Singles Week by issuing a press release and a radio spot acknowledging the growing size of the unmarried population in the United States and describing various demographic facts about this diverse segment of the American population. "Singles Week", as it is known to many, has been designated as a commemorative occasion by the Census Bureau, along with other specially designated days, weeks, and months, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, National Nurses Week, Older Americans Month, and Women's History Month.

The idea of designating a week to celebrate single people originated with the Buckeye Singles Council in Ohio in the mid-1980s. When that group dissolved a few years later, Janet Jacobson assumed the responsibility of promoting National Singles Week for a few years. Janet was the coordinator of what then was called the National Singles Press Association. With the advent of the Internet, and with websites replacing dating services and singles magazines, that organization also folded.

After languishing for a few years without any significant promotion, National Singles Week became a project of the American Association for Single People. AASP blew the dust off Singles Week and, in 2001, promoted it with press releases, newspaper ads, and a series of events in Washington D.C. That year, the group visited the offices of all members of Congress and distributed information about the social, legal, and economic needs of what then was about 82 million unmarried Americans. Members of congress who were single or unmarried were given special greeting cards for the occasion. "Unmarried Majority" certificates were distributed to officials who represented districts in which the majority of households were headed by unmarried adults. Responding to the requests of AASP, governors of eight states declared the third week of September as National Singles Week and issued proclamations to recognize the occasion.

The following year, AASP changed its name to Unmarried America. The group ramped up its promotional efforts and was successful in getting dozens of governors, mayors, and city councils throughout the nation to issue

proclamations declaring the third week of September as Unmarried and Single Americans Week in their jurisdictions. The Census Bureau accepted the suggestion of Unmarried America to add Unmarried and Single Americans Week to the list of commemorative occasions acknowledged by its Facts for Features Series. A radio spot about Singles Week was distributed by the Census Bureau to 50,000 radio stations throughout the nation.

Unmarried America returned to Washington D.C. to celebrate Unmarried and Single Americans Week in 2003. Members visited the offices of all 435 Representatives and 100 Senators. An informational briefing on "Federal Issues Affecting Unmarried and Single Americans" was conducted in the Rayburn House Office Building for members of Congress and their staffers. At an awards dinner that year, several individuals were acknowledged for their efforts to promote equal rights for unmarried and single Americans.

Over the past several years, dozens of newspapers and magazines have published stories during Unmarried and Single Americans Week, focusing attention on the needs and concerns of single people as workers, tenants, consumers, taxpayers, and voters.

Although Singles Week started off as a local celebration in Ohio, it is now a national public awareness campaign with its own website – www.nationalsinglesweek.com – and is an annual opportunity to educate the entire nation about the concerns of this large and growing segment of the population. A majority of American households is headed by unmarried adults. More than 43 percent of adults are single, divorced, or widowed. Some 44 percent of the American workforce is unmarried. Single people play a major role in American politics.

Since it was initiated 25 years ago, the idea of pausing for a moment to recognize the existence of single people, and the significant roles they play in society, seems to be an idea that has taken on a life of its own.

Unmarried and Single Americans Week is an opportunity for all Americans to reflect on how their lives have been advanced and enhanced by their colleagues, friends, and neighbors who are single or unmarried. ♦♦♦

Thomas F. Coleman is the executive Director of Unmarried America – an information service for unmarried workers, consumers, taxpayers, and voters.

www.unmarriedamerica.org