



**To: Interested Parties**

**From: Page Gardner, Women's Voices. Women Vote  
Lake Research Partners**

**Re: Portrait of Unmarried African American Women and the Importance of  
Economic Issues in the 2008 Elections**

In Unmarried America, 2007 – our groundbreaking study of the lives of unmarried Americans – we found that for many unmarried Americans, living on the economic margins is the norm. The situation, we found, was even worse for unmarried *women*, and particularly bad for unmarried *African American* women.<sup>1</sup> Compared to unmarried white women, unmarried black women have lower incomes and have less satisfaction with their personal financial situations.<sup>2</sup> A study of more recent public data reveals that the unmarried African American women base much of their vote criterion on economic and pocketbook issues.

Unmarried African American women are asserting their political power like never before, and will support candidates who can address their economic plight will draw their attention. Importantly, with the South Carolina primary just days away and Super Tuesday just weeks away, unmarried African American women can also make a crucial difference in the battle for the nomination for President of the United States.

### Why they Matter

African American women comprise 6 percent of all American adult citizens. Most of those African American women (72 percent) are unmarried. All together, there are almost 9.5 million unmarried African American women across the country, representing 18 percent of all unmarried women, while married black women account for only 7 percent of all married women.

Unmarried African American women comprise 5 percent of all Americans, but their impact is far larger.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report, “unmarried African American women” are defined as women who are American citizens and 18 years of age or older who consider themselves to be only black (not mixed race) and not of Hispanic or Latino origin who are separated, divorced, widowed, or have never been married.

<sup>2</sup> Unmarried America, 2007; Women's Voices. Women Vote. and Lake Research Partners; July 2007; pp. 177-182.

<sup>3</sup> American Community Survey, 2006.

While turnout among unmarried African American women is slightly lower than among married African American women (61 percent and 70 percent, respectively, in the 2004 general election), unmarried black women had the highest voting participation rate among all unmarried women in 2004. Among all other unmarried women turnout was only 58 percent.<sup>4</sup> In 2006, 41 percent of unmarried black women voted, which was slightly higher than the rate for other unmarried women (40 percent voted) and 12 points higher than unmarried black men (29 percent).<sup>5</sup>

Part of the reason why African American women have a higher propensity to go to the polls is because of the importance they place on their church. Many studies have shown that religious service attendance is a strong predictor of voting, and unmarried African American women attend church far more often than all other unmarried women. More than one out of three unmarried black women (34 percent) attend church every week, and another 34 percent attend at least once a month. By contrast, only 22 percent of all other unmarried women are weekly churchgoers, and 19 percent attend once a month or more.<sup>6</sup>

Still, more can be done to raise the turnout rate for unmarried African American women. In 2004, there were 3.4 million unmarried African American women who were eligible to vote but did not turn out. More than 800,000 were registered but did not vote, and over 2.5 million were eligible but not registered.<sup>7</sup>

### **Their Pocketbook Struggles**

Many unmarried women live every day with great economic anxiety, and this is especially true among African American unmarried women. Among unmarried black women who voted in the 2006 general elections, 48 percent believed their families' financial situation had deteriorated over the previous two years, while only 17 percent thought things had improved (27 percent of all women said their families' financial situation had deteriorated). In terms of the national economy, an overwhelming 85 percent of unmarried black women thought that the economy was in either "not-so-good" (57 percent) or "poor" (28 percent) shape at the time they voted, while only 55 percent of all women felt the same way.<sup>8</sup>

A demographic study of unmarried African American women clearly shows why economic issues dominate their issue agenda. Compared to the other unmarried women, unmarried African American women:

- **Have less formal education.** Only 15 percent of unmarried black women have a college degree (well under the rate of 22 percent for all other unmarried women). Similarly, 55 percent of the unmarried African American female population has only a high school

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<sup>4</sup> Current Population Survey, Nov. 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Current Population Survey, Nov. 2006.

<sup>6</sup> General Social Survey, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Current Population Survey, Nov. 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Voter News Services, National Exit Poll, Nov. 2006.

education or less, while 46 percent of all other unmarried women have no more than a high school diploma.<sup>9</sup>

- **Earn less money.** More than half (52 percent) of unmarried black women have household incomes below \$30,000 per year (the rate for all other unmarried women is 40 percent). They are also far less likely than other unmarried women to have a household income of \$75,000 or more (13 percent, compared to 22 percent).<sup>10</sup>
- **Are more likely to be raising a child.** Almost three out of 10 unmarried black women (29 percent) have at least one of their own children living in the same residence as them. This rate is significantly higher than the percentage for other unmarried women (16 percent).<sup>11</sup> In addition, unmarried African American women are twice as likely as other unmarried women to have a grandchild living with them (6 percent to 3 percent).<sup>12</sup>
- **Are more likely to rent their homes and are more mobile.** More than half (52 percent) of unmarried African American women rent the residence they reside in, while 47 percent are homeowners. For the rest of the unmarried female population, the figures are reversed: 57 percent own, and 38 percent rent.<sup>13</sup> Unmarried African American women have also, on average, lived at their current address for less time than other unmarried women. While just over half (52 percent) of other unmarried women have lived at their current residence for at least 5 years, the rate is slightly lower (45 percent) for unmarried African American women.<sup>14</sup>
- **Are slightly younger.** Unmarried African American women are more likely than other unmarried women to be in the 18-to-49 year-old age range (66 percent, compared to 57 percent). While one-quarter (25 percent) of all other unmarried women are 65 or older, only 15 percent of unmarried black women are in the elderly age range.<sup>15</sup>

Also important to consider is how health care affects the economic well-being of unmarried African American women. They are extremely concerned about health care costs for many different reasons. In particular, unmarried African American women are “very worried” about:<sup>16</sup>

- “That their health plain is more worried about saving money than about what is the best treatment for them” (67 percent are “very worried” about that).

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<sup>9</sup> American Community Survey, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Current Population Survey, Nov. 2006.

<sup>12</sup> American Community Survey, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> General Social Survey, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Current Population Survey, Nov. 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation National Health Poll, Health Tracking Poll – 2008 Presidential Election, Oct. 2007.

- “Having to pay more for their health care or health insurance” (58 percent).
- “Not being able to afford the prescription drugs they need” (55 percent).
- “Losing their health insurance coverage” (52 percent).

### **The Demand for Action**

***Unmarried African American women want their elected leaders to address their economic concerns, and they believe there is a role for government in solving these problems.*** On several important measures of support for government action on economic issues, unmarried African American women are more supportive of a pro-active government than other unmarried women.<sup>17</sup>

- Unmarried African American women are *especially* in favor of government intervention to bring down health care costs. More than half (52 percent) are very much in favor of “the government in Washington (helping) people... pay for doctors and hospital bills.” For unmarried women who are not black the rate is 35 percent.
- Close to one-third (32 percent) of unmarried African American women strongly believe that “the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor.” The rate for other unmarried women is only 23 percent.
- Thirty-four percent of African American women who are unmarried feel strongly that “the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all poor Americans,” while 22 percent of unmarried women who are not African American feel the same way.

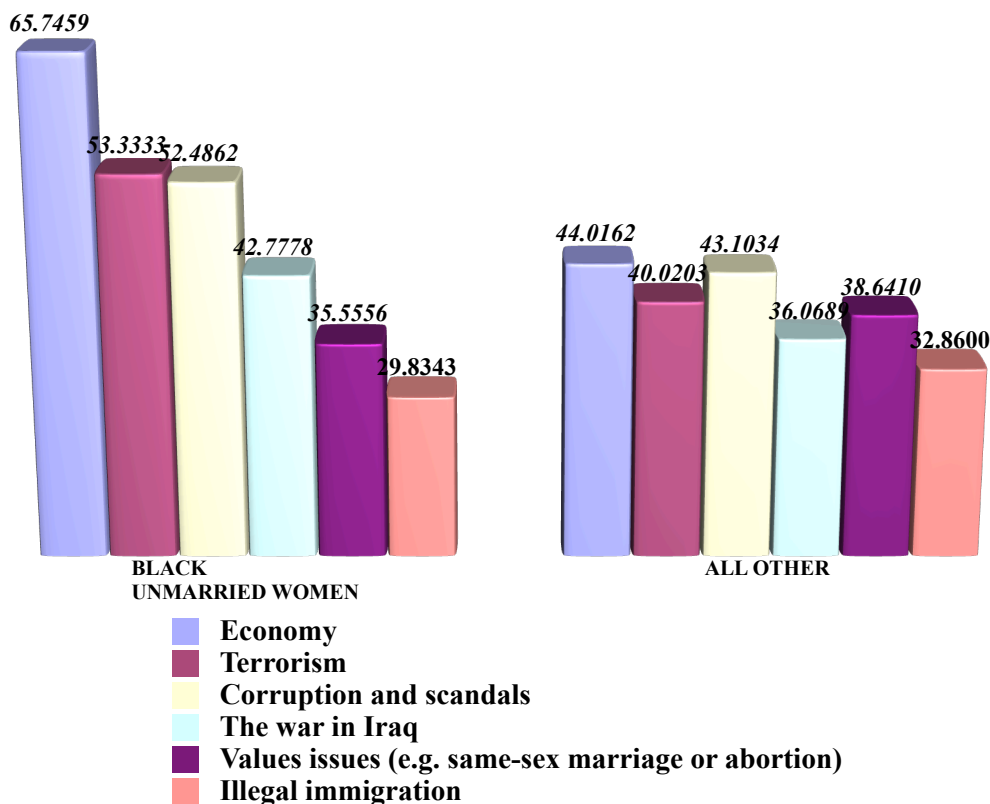
In the 2006 elections, unmarried African American female voters rated the economy far above all other major issues in terms of importance. Two out of three unmarried African American women who voted (66 percent) said the economy was “*extremely* important” in determining their vote in U.S. House races that year. For other women voters, the economy was rated “extremely important” much less often (44 percent), and it was virtually tied among other women with “corruption and scandals” (43 percent “extremely important”) as being the top-rated issue when it came to their votes in Congressional elections.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> General Social Survey, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Voter News Services, National Exit Poll, Nov. 2006.

**IMPORTANCE OF ISSUES IN DETERMINING HOUSE VOTE**  
 (% saying “extremely important”)



**The Upcoming Primaries and Caucuses**

On January 26, registered Democrats in South Carolina will go to the polls and most African American female voters will vote in that primary. The winner of that election could gain a substantial advantage in the race for the Democratic nomination. Three days later, Florida voters will go to the polls for their primary, and 22 other states will hold their primaries and caucuses on “Super Tuesday,” February 5<sup>th</sup>. Over 2,000 delegates will be up for grabs in those states for Democrats and 1,200 for Republicans, and by February 6, the nominees might be determined from the outcome of these elections.

Unmarried African American women have a great opportunity to play a major role in these races. In South Carolina, 28 percent of the adult population is African American, and 11 percent are unmarried African American women. Six of the states voting on “Super Tuesday” have adult African American populations of 14 percent or more, and the black vote is expected to be a major determinant of the victor in these states.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Current Population Survey, 2006.

State	Total Vote Eligible Population	% African American	% Unmarried African American Women	# of Unmarried African American Women
South Carolina	3089216	28%	11%	326117
Georgia	6091706	29%	12%	707027
Alabama	3328600	25%	10%	338664
Delaware	600444	19%	7%	39921
Tennessee	4261508	16%	6%	256418
Arkansas	2026340	16%	6%	111913
Illinois	8578353	14%	6%	531941

### **Conclusion**

Unmarried African American women vote more often than any other unmarried group. They account for 12% of all women and 18% of all unmarried women. They have particular strength in the South and their voice will be heard by February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007 following important Presidential primaries. Their voices have demanded action on economic issues. These women seek a government that will make the economic well being of *all* Americans its first priority. They want their elected leaders to make health care costs more affordable, ensure economic stability, and shorten the gap between the rich and poor in America. In this year's presidential campaign season, the candidate who addresses the needs of unmarried African American women the best could have a considerable advantage in the race for the Presidency.