

"Reproduced from the Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, scanned from Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford Studies Project – Transcription of letter from Ida Husted Harper, an American author, journalist, columnist, and suffragist, as well as the author of the biography of Susan B. Anthony, to Elizabeth C. Carter, president, Northeastern Federation of Women's Clubs, on March 18, 1919."

LESLIE WOMAN SUFFRAGE COMMISSION, INC.

171 Madison Ave.

New York City

March 18, 1919

Miss Elizabeth C. Carter,

President, Northeastern Federation of Women's Clubs

New Bedford, Mass.

My dear Miss Carter:

Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National Woman Suffrage Association, has been talking with me in reference to the application of the Northeastern Federation of Women's Clubs for co-operative membership and has asked me to write you my views. She feels that as I am not an officer of the association I can do this simply as a friend. My father and mother were Abolitionists, and before and during the Civil War their doors

were always open to the colored people. They were in favor of women suffrage before there was any movement for it. I have helped it since I was in my twenties and as Secretary for my State Association arranged a course of lectures for Susan B. Anthony in 1887. I went with her through the California campaign of 1896 and at its close she asked me to write her Biography because of my intense sympathy with all that she stood for.

While I was in her home writing the book we entertained Booker Washington, the "Methodist Episcopal Bishop Walters, Ida Wells Barnett and other colored guests.

I write you these things to show you my sympathy and interest for the colored race. And its women especially have no stronger friend than myself. Some years ago the National Association of Colored Women passed an official resolution thanking me for my writings in their behalf. It would be impossible for me to give any advice that I did not believe to be for their highest welfare and in this spirit I am asking your Federation to withdraw temporarily its application for admission to the National American Suffrage Association.

The situation in regard to the Federal Amendment has now reached its climax and without that amendment there will not be universal woman suffrage in your life time. Until within a few years the Southern members of Congress have stood like a solid wall against it and have been sustained by

the women of their States. Through reason, argument, logic and diplomacy every Southern State Suffrage Association now supports the Federal Amendment. With this backing 56 Southern Representatives voted for it when it was carried in the Lower House, Jan. 10, 1917. In March, 1914, three Democratic Senators voted for it; in October 1916, 12; in February, 1919, 13. These figures show the remarkable progress in Southern sentiment.

This Federal Amendment has now become a question of cold, hard politics. Even if the Republican members of Congress should stand solidly for it they have not the two-thirds necessary to carry it, but eight from the six States represented by your Federation are unalterably opposed to it. Some Democratic votes are absolutely essential to carry it and most of these must come from the South. Without the consent of some Southern Legislatures it positively cannot be ratified after it has been submitted. In the closing days of the last session Senator Jones, Chairman of the Suffrage Committee, offered the amendment with a change in the enabling act which Senator Gay of Louisiana was willing to accept and, if a vote could have been secured, it would have carried, but the Republicans prevented a vote.

Such is the situation. Many of the Southern members are now willing to surrender their beloved doctrine of State's rights, and their only obstacle

is fear of “the colored woman’s vote” in the States where it is likely to equal or exceed the white woman’s vote. It has been the policy of the leaders of the National Association to meet this foreboding with silence. It has never yielded one inch of its original position taken when it was founded fifty years ago: “The right of suffrage shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex.” This was its first demand, this is the exact wording of the Federal Amendment today. It has refused to assist in any way the effort of the women of any state for a white women’s franchise, a tax-paying women’s franchise or anything except universal suffrage. The proposed Federal Amendment applies to colored women exactly as it applies to white women. If it fails, both alike will remain disfranchised.

Two-thirds of both houses of the new Congress are pledged to vote for this amendment. There is every indication that it will be adopted early in the session. The opponents are not leaving a stone unturned to defeat it and if the news is flashed throughout the Southern States at this most critical moment that the National American Association has just admitted an organization of 6,000 colored women, the enemies can cease from further effort--the defeat of the Amendment will be assured. It is for the Northeastern Federation of Women’s Clubs to determine whether admission as a co-operative member of the Association at the present time is worth to it the sacrifice of the Federal Amendment, or whether it cannot

afford to delay its application until this crisis has passed. Many personal sacrifices have been made during the last threescore years by those who have carried on the struggle for woman suffrage. Can you not accept this as the one laid upon you?

Cordially yours,

(signed) Ida Husted Harper

This letter is not for publication. I will be pleased to receive an answer.