

1860. Volunteer Democratic Association of New York

Source: North American and U.S. Gazette, November 6, 1860 Philip S. Foner, *Business & Slavery, The New York Merchants & the Irrepressible Conflict*. New York/Russell & Russell, p. 173.

As tension increased between the North and South during the 1850s, the New York City merchant elite felt pressured to reassure Southern allies that they could depend on them for political support. In October 1859, a mass meeting was held at Cooper Union to organize a Democratic Vigilant Association to counter growing Republican and anti-slavery sentiment. Among the prominent founders of the committee were August Belmont, William Astor, Moses Taylor, William Havemeyer and Samuel Tilden. Belmont headed a major Wall Street brokerage and was the American Agent for the European Rothchild banking interests. William Astor managed his family's Manhattan-based real estate empire. Moses Taylor was a leading industrialist and financier involved in the Cuban sugar trade. William Havemeyer was elected mayor of New York City three times and owned sugar refineries. Samuel Tilden was a corporate lawyer, Governor of New York, and the Democratic Party candidate for president in 1876. Sources: Burrows, E. and Wallace, M. (1999). *Gotham, A History of New York City to 1898*. NY: Oxford, 861. Jackson, K., ed. (1995). *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. New Haven: Yale, 62, 100, 1155, 532, 1184.

The "Volunteer Democratic Association of New York" made the following appeal to the Breckenridge and Lane, Bell and Everett, and Douglas and Johnson State Central Committees of the State of New York (*Journal of Commerce*, August 21, 1860).

Gentlemen - When the interests of the common country are at stake, all good citizens should concur in promoting the unity of action without which the best intentions are as nothing, and the most energetic movements serve only to disorganize. We, an association of the Union-loving, practical men, brought together by a sense of common danger, are anxious to impress upon our fellow citizens thorough you-, their representatives, the fact that "in union there is strength," a great truth, on a conviction of which our national prosperity is based, and of which the wisest of our statesmen seem, for the past year, to have entirely lost sight.

So powerful are the combinations of the Republicans at the North, so unyielding and defiant is the attitude of the extreme disunionists at the South, that if the Empire State, whose word is law where she presents an unbroken front, does not now give an example of self-denial and compromise, she will again be open to the charge of having in a moment of passion betrayed those interests, of which, from her position, she may be said to hold the balance of power.

It rests with you, by a judicious compromise of interests, only seemingly in conflict, to make yourself truly great, and deserve the thanks of a great city, a vast state, and of a nation for whose prosperity the prayers of millions of down-trodden free men throughout the world, each day accords with the Divine dispenser of all things.