

Tammany Hall on the Cuban Question (1859)

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During the 1840s and 1850s, the United States attempted to purchase Cuba from Spain. In March, 1859, a meeting was held at Tammany Hall in New York City in support of the annexation of Cuba as a slave state. Among the supporters of this proposal were several prominent business leaders and future governor and presidential candidate, Samuel Tilden. The keynote speaker was Senator Brown of Mississippi.

Tammany Hall On the Cuban Question

“The New-York Democracy assembled, last night, in Tammany Hall, for the purpose of expressing their views as to the policy of extending “the Area of Freedom,” *àpropos* of the movement regarding the acquisition of Cuba. The meeting was a large one, and would have been larger, but for the rain which sent away numbers who, waiting the opening of the door, had gathered round a bonfire that sputtered for a while in front of the Hall. . . .

The resolutions, which were equally numerous, may be summed up in this one, which was last: Resolved, That the bond of mutual advantages and interests between the United States and Cuba makes it imperative upon the former to use all just exertions and make all reasonable sacrifices for the liberation of the latter. . . . Democracy, like the ocean tide, will not back at the bidding of any King. . . . The resolutions. . . were adopted unanimously.

Senator Brown, of Mississippi, was the first speaker. His appearance drew forth loud and repeated plaudits. He commenced by declaring that Cuba must and shall be ours. . . . In wanting Cuba, we wanted territorial expansion. . . . But we wanted Cuba, not only for the purpose of territorial expansion, but of national defence (*sic*), and in order to extend our agricultural resources, for we wanted more sugar and cheaper sugar. Ten again, we wanted Cuba for an extension of our commerce. But better (?), he wanted Cuba for the extension Slavery. That was his individual wish. In that he spoke for himself, and not for his party.”

Editorial, Tammany on Cuba

When he [Senator Brown] remarked that he was in favor of acquiring Cuba because she would be a Slave State, he spoke candidly. When he said that Slavery was sanctioned by the Divine law, he was merely impertinent to the question; and when he went so far as to declare that the Democratic party would rush to the poll;s in 1860 upon the direct issue of the immediate possession of Cuba, he twaddled almost sublimely. . . . He will hardly find the good people of Gotham ready to indorse 9sic) this curious position. . . . Tammany has exploded its powder, butnt up its tar-barrels, blown off its music. These are past praying for. But it can at least reconsoider its position, and in some soberer moment of the future will doubtless do so with emphasis, if not with delight.