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Joseph Hodges Choate (1832-1917)

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CHOATE, JOSEPH HODGES (24 January 1832-14 May 1917), trial lawyer and diplomat, Choate was born in Salem, Massachusetts, and graduated from Harvard College (1852) and its law school (1854). Rapidly he became one of the nation's most prominent attorneys, known for his formidable intellect and oratorical skills. Counsel for such corporations as Standard Oil, American Sugar Refining, and American Tobacco, Choate also defended the estates of such notables as Cornelius Vanderbilt, Samuel J. Tilden, and Alexander T. Stewart, and the endowment of Leland Stanford. He emerged as lead counsel in *Pollock v. Farmer's Loan and Trust Co.* (1895), in which he argued the unconstitutionality of the 1894 income tax law before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court not only struck down the 1894 law but also reversed an earlier decision, in *Springer v. United States* (1881), that had upheld income tax collection. Choate, though influential in New York Republican politics, never held elected office. He nominated Theodore Roosevelt for the state assembly. Choate's efforts against corruption led the ouster of Tammany's infamous William "Boss" Tweed. President William McKinley appointed Choate ambassador to Great Britain in 1899, and he served with distinction for six years. During his tenure, Choate helped secure British agreement to the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty of 1901, which sped the Panama Canal's construction. He also smoothed the way for British, French, and Russian acceptance of Secretary of State John Hay's "Open Door" policy on China's markets. Choate died in New York City.

Further Reading: Theron George Strong, *Choate: New Englander, New Yorker, Lawyer, Ambassador*, 1917; William V. Rowe, "Joseph

H. Choate and the Right Training for the Bar," *Case and Comment* 24 (September 1917): 264-276; D. M. Marshman, Jr., "The Four Ages of Joseph Choate," *American Heritage* 26 (1975): 32-40, 96-97.

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