

Amity Shale's *Coolidge* is a reexamination of Calvin Coolidge, America's 30th president. The reputation of "silent Cal" has long hovered in the lower third of presidential rankings, a ranking which reflects his passive approach to governance. In Shale's view, that restraint was his genius.

Coolidge was born in Vermont, attended Amherst College, practiced law in Massachusetts and became in state Republican politics. As Governor, he achieved national notoriety by suppressing the Boston police strike (1919). This paved the way to a Vice-Presidential nomination and from there, to the White House. As president, his "austere Republican Calvinism" kept taxes low, the budget balanced and the economy unimpeded. He was, in her words, "our great refrainer." He presided over an economic bubble which burst shortly after he left office; that collapse resulted in the great depression of the 1930s.

Shlaes has assiduously researched Coolidge's life, drawing both on his private papers and contemporary newspaper reports. I was surprised to learn the extent to which Coolidge's public image was shaped by publicists who thought that the Coolidge brand could be effectively marketed to a public weary of War and Wilson (Bruce Barton, who famously compared Jesus to a successful Executive, wrote the first national article about him). Time will tell whether the "great refrainer" will be seen as "the last president with a proper sense of his office's constitutional proportions (George F. Will)" or as "a bleak omen from the past (Jacob Heilbrunn)."