



# **The Fieldston Guide to American History for Cynical Beginners: Impractical Lessons for Everyday Life**

*Jim Cullen*

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Are You a Cynical Beginner? You may not have a Ph.D. in history, but you already know -- or can readily believe -- that Columbus didn't exactly "discover" America. Or that the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence was a slaveholder. Or that our leaders may not be entirely committed to the effort to make sure that in fact no child is left behind. But the truth of individual lives can be more compelling than they initially appear: surprising, informative, and maybe even inspiring. This book explores a few such lives, and the lessons they offer in ways that might actually mean something outside a classroom. These biographical case studies -- which include General George Washington, who was once invited to lead a military coup against the new American government; Ida Wells, who responded to lynchings by publicly mocking the manhood of those who murdered African Americans; and Eugene Debs, who chose to go to jail to protect free speech -- explore a series of questions. How does one keep true to one's principles in the face of social pressure? What strategies work best in addressing your opponents? Can public acts atone for private flaws? In different ways, the profiles in courage here provide answers to these questions -- not definitive answers, but real ones. You can weigh them, accept them, reject them, or -- who knows? -- maybe even apply them. You may not end up any less cynical after leafing through this book. But you will be less of a beginner.

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