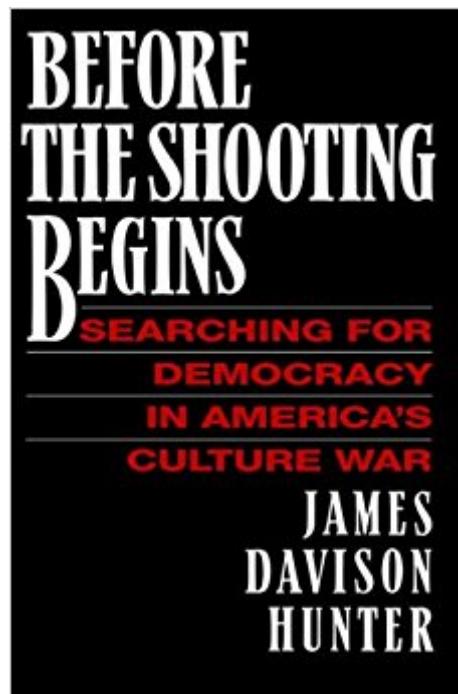


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# Before The Shooting Begins



## **Synopsis**

Addressing America's cultural conflict about such issues as abortion, homosexuality, and family values, the author presents a plan in which America can achieve a renewed democracy, despite these differences. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Hunter follows up his 1991 book *Culture Wars* with this extended case study of the seemingly intractable abortion controversy, astutely probing the shortcomings in the current discourse. He carefully lays out the rhetorical distortions of activists on both sides and points out unarticulated interests like the unwillingness of "pro-lifers" to question the concept of "traditional family." Analyzing interviews and survey data, he suggests that most Americans are ignorant of actual abortion regulations, which leads to a politics of emotion. He criticizes the superficiality of press coverage in probing the implications of the controversy, conservatives and progressives alike who misrepresent the historical and legal record, and he warns that multicultural education may reinforce a "culture of emotivism." Hunter's solution, however--"an enlarged and deepened debate," beginning in local and regional forums--deserves a more thorough exposition. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Noting that cultural wars tend to precede the shooting kind, sociologist Davison (Univ. of Virginia; *Culture Wars*, 1991, etc.) opens here with some pretty hair-raising prognostications: the last time America was rent by such bitterly acrimonious debate over fundamental issues of political ideology

was just prior to the Civil War. Essentially, this is an overview of the abortion question, for the author takes it as axiomatic that all questions in contemporary ideology are ultimately about the body, which itself stands as a metaphor and reflection of the ``body politic.'' This interesting point of departure, though, doesn't lead Hunter to a very convincing scenario when he suggests that the gunning down of abortion provider Dr. David Gunn in Florida in February 1993 was the first shot in a real, not discursive, war. The author, however, is more effective at showing how public debate has become reduced to a level of antidemocratic and intolerant caricature and slander. Bias in the press goes largely unpunished and unexamined, he claims, and it is indeed curious to learn that the number of anti- abortionists arrested (over 65,000) between 1987 and 1991 is higher than the number of those arrested from any other organized protest movement this century. Hunter is not rushing to the defense of pro- lifers here, but he is merely pointing to the trivialization of the abortion issue in the media and the consequent veering away from true democracy that such a skewing entails. Although he exaggerates the significance of the abortion issue with regard to the continued existence of an American cultural unity, Hunter does make shrewd and intriguing points about the media and their ever-accelerating moronism--though hardly ones we have not heard before. --

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FACT: Not many people really care about the abortion issue anymore. FACT: Not many people ever really did. FACT: Special interest and lobbying groups, not regular people, are the ones who 'take sides' and push the abortion debate. FACT: The regular person, when polled, is smack-dab in the middle of the two "sides". So Congress just passed a bill banning partial birth abortions, hailing it as a big victory...despite the fact that less than 1 percent of abortions are late term. Why, if congress has so much else to do that affects so many more people, did they spend so much time, money, and emotion on this piddley bill? Read this book to find out. Here is the irony. Abortion is one of the most polarized issues we've ever faced as a nation. BUT, the average person is overwhelmingly ambivalent about it. No one is completely pro-life; no one is completely pro-choice - except the lobby groups who have everything to gain from demonizing the opposition, scaring the citizenry by exaggerating problems (this is how the later-term abortion bill got so much attention; and remember the Bork Supreme Court nominations?). Anyway, this book is very neutral to each side and is premised on the idea that how the abortion debates have been conducted is more a symptom of a declining deliberative democracy than it is about lack of moral resources. The conclusions above are well borne out in this book and the author is rightly befuddled over how any of this actually

happened. Good book for all political science or ethics students. The abortion debate is used as a micro-cosm, pointing at larger problems prevalent in how we conduct political "debate" (read; No Spin Zone) and how the average citizen thinks (or doesn't) on the issues affecting us.

I receive the book in excellent conditions.

Even though it was written nearly 20 years ago, "Before the Shooting Begins" by James Davison Hunter is an important book for today. Focusing on the abortion debate as a microcosm of the way in which issues divide Americans into separate camps, Hunter attempts to get at the root of why it is that those on both sides of the divide seemingly "talk past" each other. Hunter's main thesis is well summed up in a statement found on page 148: "Without a base of knowledge about the law, without traditions of moral understanding to draw upon, and without cohesive moral communities within whose values, norms, and ideals our lives are patterned, all we have left are our emotions. Public debate among citizens becomes an exercise in emoting toward one another." What Hunter says rings true. Whether we are talking about abortion, or, to take more recent examples, immigration and healthcare, we are a nation that no longer shares a common worldview. Thus, the conclusions we reach on a variety of issues are going to be derived from a set of presuppositions that are self-evident to us but are not shared by those with whom we are dialoguing. As a result, our arguments will have little impact on them and theirs will seem implausible to us. We will continue to simply talk past each other. In a situation such as this, the easiest thing to do is to vilify and impugn the motives of our opponents. One need but listen to the many opinion shows on television to see that such vilification and misrepresentation has taken the place of serious debate. In light of the fact that the situation has not gotten better since Hunter wrote this book but has only gotten worse, Hunter's book is certainly worthy of consideration today.

Hunter's book lives up to the publisher's blurb. If you have any interest whatsoever in the world outside your front door, read it. This is information you need.

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