

Guinness, Os, *Entrepreneurs of Life: Faith and the Venture of Purposeful Living*, TRINITY FORUM STUDY SERIES (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001).

Guinness Os, ed., *Character Counts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

Hunter, James Davison, *The Death of Character* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Hunter, James Davison, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

These resources are available for purchase through our online store at [www.thetrinityforum.org](http://www.thetrinityforum.org)

THE TRINITY FORUM  
7902 WESTPARK DRIVE, SUITE A  
MCLEAN, VIRGINIA 22102-4202

*Contributing to the transformation and renewal of society  
through the transformation and renewal of leaders.*



## *Group Discussion Guide*

### **Briefing vol. 3 no. 2: To Change the World**

---

#### **James Davison Hunter**

Dr. James Davison Hunter presented “To Change the World” to the Trinity Forum Board of Trustees on June 21, 2002. Dr. Hunter is the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies at the University of Virginia and the Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. He has served on the faculty of the University of Virginia since 1983 and is presently chair of the sociology department.

Widely published and nationally recognized, Dr. Hunter has received numerous literary awards for his work regarding change in culture and its effects on society. He has written seven books, including *The Death of Character* and *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*.

#### **Discussion questions**

**1** In the midst of great political, economic, and social volatility around the globe, why do you think Hunter says that there is unprecedented opportunity to strategically engage the world for good? What does he mean by “Everything is to play for”?

**2** What is the common view of changing culture today? Who shapes it and how? From this perspective, how are widespread changes in society then made? What types of activism or activities are born out of these beliefs? What initial evidence or examples does Hunter cite to argue against this perspective? Which perspective reflects your thinking? Does his point of view challenge yours at all? If so, in what way? What do you think of his reasoning?

3 In the second half of his talk, Hunter lays out an alternative view of how cultures change. What is his assessment of the popular phrase, “ideas have consequences”? What does he say is required for ideas to have substantial consequences? According to Peter L. Berger, how do ideas succeed?

4 In Proposition 1, Hunter says that culture is a resource and a form of power. How does he relate culture to capital? Why is cultural capital powerful? What can it ultimately allow a person to do?

5 In Proposition 2, Hunter says that culture is produced, not by the “great man” but by the “network” and its new institutions. How does this idea challenge our basic perception of history? Which examples that he cited most surprised you? Can you think of others? Where does individual genius fit into this understanding?

6 In his third proposition, Hunter argues that the production of culture is within a rigid structure of “the center and the periphery.” Is this a fair assessment of where dominant culture originates, or is it merely elitist? Can you think of some cultural institutions that are fundamentally good but weak in their impact because they reside on the periphery? What would it take for them to have a broader influence?

7 Fourth, Hunter proposes that cultures change from the top down. Why does he argue that lasting change rarely comes from the bottom up? What movements in history does he identify to support his argument? What strikes you about some of the statistics and information he quotes from Collins’s work? What are some of the hallmarks of civilization-making that he mentions?

8 Finally, Hunter states that cultural change is most effective when elites, their networks, and their institutions overlap. What areas in particular, when they overlap, have the greatest potential for change? How does vision come into play in consequential change?

9 Do Hunter’s statements in any way discount the need for the renewal of individual hearts and minds? How does this task fit into his larger argument?

10 Why do people of faith and goodwill have difficulty with the subject of power? Does Hunter succeed in describing power in a way that is not only more palatable but positive? How? Who ultimately bears the burden of this power?

11 What is the difference between elites and elitism? How is it possible to embrace the responsibility of being an elite or to support elites without becoming elitist?

12 In light of Hunter’s message, consider your own life—your profession, your relationships, your activities and interests. While he is speaking to the highest level of leadership, his ideas easily translate to a local or community level. What role might you play in changing the world? Is there an area of your society or culture that you could influence? Do you know of like-minded people who might join you in this pursuit?

© 2002 by The Trinity Forum. All rights reserved.

## Related Trinity Forum Readings

*The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg* by Mark Twain, foreword by J. McDonald Williams (Spring 1999).

*Pericles’ Funeral Oration* by Thucydides, foreword by Henry J. “Bud” Smith (Spring 1995).

*Poor Man’s Earl: An Introduction to Lord Shaftesbury, the Great Reformer* by John Pollock, foreword by Os Guinness (Fall 1999).

*William Wilberforce: A Man Who Changed His Times* by John Pollock, foreword by Doug Holladay (Spring 1996).

## Further Reading

Aikman, David, *Great Souls: Six Who Changed the Century* (Nashville: Word, 1998).