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## Time Capsule Discourse

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## Time Capsule Discourse

### Abstract

*The purpose of this presentation is to encourage participants to develop a deeper sensitivity toward different perceptions of historical events. Attendees will participate in a forum that invites free expression of cultural values, and encourages participants to keep an open mind when encountering values and perspectives different from their own.*

E. Hughes Shanks, MP A

Assistant Director, University of Nebraska, Omaha, Campus Recreation, Omaha,, NE.

The Time Capsule Discourse is a workshop that attempts to develop broad cultural perspectives of selected events in American history. Participants will produce a list of historical events to be placed inside of a hypothetical time capsule for posterity. All events will be qualitatively defined via group discussions and selected (or eliminated) by majority vote.

The first task will be to select various significant historical events through open discussion.

The second task will be to identify the most distinctive characteristics of events that will be determined by majority vote.

The main objective of those discussions is to increase sensitivity among divergent perspectives through an exchange of ideas.

(I) the Moderator will guide participants to a final process of selection (and elimination) that will include only the most essential and descriptive events in our history as agreed to by majority vote.

*Note: A secondary feature of the discourse assumes that a participant's perspective may broaden from experiencing some inevitable losses in the selection process. Hence, the Moderator will encourage participants to contribute significant qualities of some events that may also exist in other events that may even have been excluded. The exclusion (or selection) of an historical event or the characterization of an event may become problematic for some. Additionally, although the process of developing a select list of presumably the most significant historic events is inherently instructive, the joint process of elimination (a.k.a. experiencing loss) is by far more likely to enhance one's sensitivity. For example: If the event in question involves someone's gain, there must also be some accounting for a subsequent loss. If someone's loss can be recognized and the loss subsequently influences how events are prepared for placement into the time capsule, a broader understanding of the event emerges.*

## Time Capsule Discourse

### Icebreaker -Personal Loss Activity

Participants will be instructed to write the names of the five most important people in their life (including family members, mentors, idols, living or deceased, etc).

Participants will number them in order of importance, "1" being the most important and "5" being the least important. Participants will then be asked to turn to someone nearby and describe why"

1" is the most important person in their life.

Its will then be instructed to draw a line through that name and repeat the process turning to another person nearby to describe why "2" is important in their life. This exercise is to continue this until only the number "5" name remains.

Introduction (To be read aloud)

Our objective today will be to develop a list of the 5 most significant events in American history for eventual placement into a time capsule. As a group we will vote to decide not only *which* events will be included and excluded, but also *how* events will be characterized. All selections and their final form will be determined by majority vote.

There is no amount of sensitivity (or good will) that can substitute for simple empathy. In the absence of empathy, the fairest historical treatment will include several available perspectives. The process of including differing perspectives in the discourse will provide a broader understanding of an event. For example: One essential characteristic of America is the historical reliance on laws. Finkleman offers a broadened perspective of Slavery that argues that Slavery is one thing, yet the legal basis for it is distinct and significant. "Americans have always been peculiarly legalistic. From the time of the drafting of the Mayflower Compact to give colonists a *legal* basis for settlement to the current debates over constitutional amendments, Americans have placed great faith in the law as a vehicle for social control or change." Slavery must be understood not only as a social, economic, or political institution but also as a political instrument." (Finkleman, 1985)

Consequently, if as participants of the current workshop, you were to offer *slavery* as a significant historic event, you might be inclined to propose instead that *Slave Law* be offered as an alternative to simple Slavery, *Law* and our dependence upon it are perhaps more telling attributes than the historic national reliance on buying and selling human beings like cattle. Put another way, human bondage, although, abhorrent, may be less so than its codification in law!

As early as I can remember, I have been aware that dominant cultures seem to enjoy a sense of accomplishment in nation building with seemingly little regard for its own losses incurred in the process. It would also seem that the voice for the experience of indigenous people (i.e. Australia, New Zealand and Africa) is muted.

It is apparent that the African people's loss of freedom due to slavery and Native American genocide due to settlement receive significantly more attention than the related losses incurred by American Settlers. We should include the likelihood that *after having left their homeland (for whatever reasons) and starting anew elsewhere* would have long-term and devastating effects on the cultural and social effects of White settlers as a whole.

It is true that as Americans, we all enjoy some benefits of the great society. However, there has always appeared to me to be collective denial of human costs. I believe that learning to cope with loss (or learning to grieve) can lead to having a more open mind toward perspectives and opinions different from my own. I do not doubt that someone's apparent inability to acknowledge the significance of his/her own losses tends to desensitize them to the affects of the loss felt by others.

Event Selection and Elimination Activity

3 basic assumptions that (I) the Moderator will use to guide the discussion. First, it is assumed that our knowledge of historic events is strongly influenced by a preponderance of information that has been supplied by the dominant culture. Secondly, it is assumed that the term "dominant

culture" and other terms like it are inherently offensive and their continued use in discussion may hinder objectivity, and American society is more strongly influenced by descendants of cultures and homelands originating from central and Western Europe who have suffered significant losses of their own.

#### Part One

The initial discussion will propose a list of 20-30 historical events. During the compilation of the list, participants will be challenged to question the breadth of traditional depictions of some events and question the accuracy of others or both.

The moderator will stipulate that the actual characteristics of a given historical event must be agreed upon in order for the event to be included in the final list. For example, the description of an historical event known as *settling the Wild West* must include the genocidal qualities of forcible settlement of native land.

#### Part Two

Afterward, small discussion groups will be asked to develop tentative lists of 5-10 important historical events. This process requires some events to be left off of the list. (Participants who feel strongly about a particular event's characteristics will be encouraged to lobby group members, touting certain attributes) Afterward, the entire group will re-convene to make the final selections.

#### Part Three

Once participants reach agreement on a final list of no more than 10 events, a second set of small discussion groups will frame qualitative interpretations of each of those events. No event can be selected until participants develop a representation of the event that passes by a majority vote of the entire group.

#### Conclusion -Final Discussion

After working in separate groups, a final list of 10 historic events will be reduced to 5 events for placement into the capsule. It is in the final discussion that participants may feel the greatest sense of loss. Conversely, empathic responses may feel a sense of gain. The purpose of the final discussion is to encourage participants to express their experience of the process. The Moderator will attempt to elicit participants feelings about any newfound sense of gain or loss to be shared with the group. The Moderator will attempt to close the activity with participant's final words about he experience.

#### Presenter

E. Hughes Shanks received a Masters Degree of Public Administration at the University of Nebraska, Omaha (UNO) in 1998. Since 1999 he has been at UNO, where he is an Assistant Director of Campus Recreation at the College of Health Physical Education and Recreation. He directs all aquatic activities and is a lecturer for the College, often teaching golf, tennis or swimming. Mr. Shanks was born in Denver, Colorado on July 7, 1958. He is married and has two daughters, Danielle, 24 and Lela, 6. He is the youngest of four children. His family moved from Kansas City, Kansas to Lincoln in 1965. He is a graduate of Lincoln High School, Class of 1976. He spent 10 years in the U.S. Military, five years U.S. Navy Band '76-'81 and five years in the Nebraska Air National Guard '82-'87. In 1987, Mr. Shanks received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln where he majored in Political Science and English. After which he began a career in Human Services that has included positions with various Nebraska and Iowa human service agencies. He has been a Family Support Worker, Drug Alcohol Treatment Clinical Specialist, Legislative Aide and Public Policy Coordinator. Mr. Shanks was been a competitive athlete for 20 years and has competed and coached at numerous National Championships in

Cycling, Swimming and Triathlon. He has qualified for the Boston Marathon numerous times and has attended the race as a coach. Mr. Shanks has competed in the Tampa Bay and Key West Marathon Swims. He has also coached at the Manhattan Island Marathon Swim and the FINA World Masters Swimming Championships.

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