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Freedom Shrine Dedication Presentation, delivered at L. V. Eberhard Center on June 27, 1991

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Will and Ariel Durant, two of this century’s most esteemed historians, may never have seen the Freedom Shrine. But they would have endorsed it. The Durants knew that however hard won our country’s independence was, and no matter that it has stayed in place for two centuries, our freedom will be lost just as fast as we forget to preserve it - and to pass it on. The 28 documents of this shrine do precisely that. They are the torch of the written word that each generation must pass to the next.

In their book *The Lessons of History*, the Durants write: "Civilization is not inherited; it has to be learned and earned by each generation anew; if the transmission should be
interrupted for one century, civilization would die, and we should be savages again." If Civilization itself is so fragile that a brief 100 years of not teaching it could obliterate it, imagine how quickly we would lose this precious commodity called freedom if we didn’t similarly transmit it to the next generation.

American children aren’t born valuing democracy. They must learn it. They must be taught about the past in order for them to revere it, appreciate it, and protect it. From the Mayflower Compact of 1620 to President Kennedy’s Inaugural Address of 1960, the Freedom Shrine summarizes the written milestones of liberty in the history of these United States. A walk past the display of documents is a trip
through the textual highlights of freedom in our nation's past.

The more familiar documents -- the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and the Bill of Rights -- are there. But so are the less obvious -- the Northwest Ordinance, the Star Spangled Banner, and the German surrender of World War II. Each deserves respect on its own. Together they summarize where we have come from as a nation that arose out of a common need for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Taken as a whole, the 28 documents of the Freedom Shrine tell the story of a nation made up of high-minded men and women who chose the risk of death over the certainty of oppression -- who said that life
without freedom was not life worth living.

Are we doing a good job teaching those who must carry the torch of freedom into the future? Is the Freedom Shrine’s message being transmitted to our young as the Durants say it must be? I will close with a letter 22-year old PFC Alex Porter from Camarillo, California, wrote to his parents on his way to the Persian Gulf last January. I think it answers that question.

"You both know and understand why I joined, and that makes it easier for me to go. Just know that I’m also going for the many Americans who have gone before me for 200 years. They paid for my freedom and yours with their blood. Their sacrifice has made it possible for me to choose my own
course, and that means more to me than anything else. So if I should fall in battle in an attempt to preserve those freedoms so the rest of our nation doesn’t have to live and grow in a terrorized America, it will be well worth the sacrifice. Because of you, I have lived the best 22 years a man could want, and because of the soldiers before me, I have lived those years freely. I hope I live to see 22 more. But if I don’t, don’t be sad, be proud."

Maybe Alex porter never saw a Freedom Shrine. But I think you’ll agree, he understands what it’s all about.