Address to
AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION
Washington, D. C.
Saturday, November 15, 1947

SADIE T. M. ALEXANDER
Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am particularly pleased to have been invited to appear at this meeting in Washington, D.C. Certainly, citizens of no other city should be more concerned than those of our national capital, to preserve, here in Washington, our American way of life. The world looks to this city and its landmarks, the capitol dome, the shaft of marble, called the Monument, the massive rotunda memorializing the immortal Lincoln, and the White House, as citadels of democracy, beacon lights of liberty and fountains of freedom. But alas, here we find a complete failure of democracy! A failure, about which I have intimate knowledge, having lived in Washington under so complete a pattern of segregation from infancy to my teens, that when I entered a college in another city where students of all races were enrolled it suddenly dawned upon me that life in my own nation's capital had been survived under the theoretical shadow of democracy, which in fact eclipsed freedom.

Therefore I am heartened that so representative a group of citizens of Washington should have joined together to discuss, criticize and, I hope, seek means to implement the recommendations of this report - that Washington may become a laboratory of human freedom.

At no time in this nation's history has it been more imperative that our way of life, the American way, be maintained at home, in every town, burrough, city, and state. Having just ended a war of physical violence beyond our ability to estimate in material losses, it is difficult to realize that we are still
in the midst of a war, a war of ideas, which is so subtle, therefore one in which it is difficult and dangerous to ferret out the enemy, yet more damaging to the spiritual and material welfare of this country than any war we ever fought. Twice before this nation has found it necessary to review the state of its civil rights; first, during the fifteen years between 1776 and 1791, from the drafting of the Declaration of Independence through the Articles of Confederation experiment to the writing of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. It was then that we developed the central theme in our American heritage, the importance of the individual person, our belief that every man has a dignity and integrity which must be respected and safeguarded; that the welfare of the individual is the final goal of group life - to be secure in the rights I wish for myself, I must be willing to respect the rights of other men. This was the development of the conscious recognition of a basic moral principle: all men are created equal. Again we faced a similar national crisis when our union was torn asunder over human slavery, at which time Lincoln decreed that no nation could exist as half free and half slave. The nation reviewed the condition of its civil rights and produced the great reconstruction amendments. It is our profound conviction that we have come to a third such era in our national history, when our winning of the battle of ideas rests upon the extent to which we can prove the practical application of our belief in the dignity of the individual and his inalienable rights.

It should be very clear to every American citizen that the America we know and love, where every man, woman, and
child has the right to worship as it best pleases his conscience, where we may educate our children in parochial or public schools, teach them to believe in the Trinity or in Jehovah, where the individual has the right to compete economically and politically for any position - so that a former haberdasher becomes the President of the United States - where a citizen can cast a secret ballot for the candidate or party of his own choice, where individuals can criticize government and where government appoints private citizens to scrutinize the national record, expose our shortcomings, and find ways of correcting them, I say, it should be clear to every American that unless we hold fast to these rights, cultivate them, assure their daily use by all the citizens and protect them against every onslaught, we shall have lost the power of moral persuasion over the peoples of the world, by our own failure at home to practice what we preach.

The committee has pointed out that the gap between our aims and what we actually do is creating a kind of moral dry rot which eats away at the emotional and rational bases of democratic beliefs. Since the publication of the report, the Group for Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP), comprising some 150 leading psychiatrists, declared in resolution in a meeting in Asbury Park, New Jersey, reported by Albert Deutsch in PM, November 12, 1947:

"As psychiatrists, we are convinced that the protection of civil rights is vital to the mental health of our citizens. Experiences which result in frustration, insecurity, fear, and hate undermine the mental health of individuals and create unhealthy relations between persons and groups."

The social conditions necessary to insure mental health, "require the full protection for all citizens" of the four basic
rights defined by the committee. /"Because these rights affect mental health we strongly urge the responsible government authorities promptly to take action to secure them to our citizens. At no time in our history has this been more important. All means of communication should be used to inform the public of the meaning of these rights and of the recommendations of the President's Committee intended to preserve them."

This resolution of GAF reflects the fourth reason for an exhaustive re-examination of our civil rights and an immediate drive to make them secure. The President's Committee chartered three reasons, the moral reason: our American heritage, teaches that to be secure in the rights he wishes for himself, each man must be willing to respect the rights of other men. "This is the conscious recognition of a basic moral principle: all men are created equal as well as free. Stemming from this principle is the obligation to build social institutions that will guarantee equality of opportunity to all men. Without this equality freedom becomes an illusion. Thus the only aristocracy that is consistent with the free way of life is an aristocracy of talent and achievement. The grounds on which our society accords respect, influence or reward to each of its citizens must be limited to the quality of his personal character and of his social contribution.

This concept of equality which is so vital a part of the American heritage knows no kinship with notions of human uniformity or regimentation. We abhor the totalitarian arrogance
which makes one man say that he will respect another man as his equal only if he has 'my race, my religion, my political views, my social position.' In our land men are equal, but they are free to be different. From these very differences among our people has come the great human and national strength of America."

The separation of children in public schools, the building of a white and black army, into which Puerto Ricans are placed on the basis of the color of their skin and the texture of their hair, while all native born citizens with one drop of Negro blood recorded on their birth certificate are placed in the black army, creates in a democracy the totalitarian concept of "my race" and causes men and women who might otherwise have maintained the equalitarian morality of their forebears to look down upon fellowmen, who differ in physical appearance but not in ability nor in human dignity by which all men are endowed by their creator.

The committee also discussed the economic reasons, which make it necessary for us now, at this moment, to view the status of its civil rights. Low wages for racial, religious or nationality groups produce lowered purchasing power, causing reduced production, which in turn cuts back employment and lowers all wages. The motivating cause may be prejudice against a particular minority group but the chain of causation is such as to effect the entire population. But the greatest loss can not be calculated in dollars and cents, for who can count the loss to a nation, which relegates more than one-fourth of its population to second-class citizenship of various types? Who
can estimate the loss in invention, citizenship, leadership or in carelessness, laziness, petty stealing, the result of thwarted personalities.

And now the psychiatrists advise us of a fourth reason to act now, the rapid spread of the four great threats to emotional stability, fear frustration, hate, and insecurity, resulting from artificially whipped up witch manias. The social conditions necessary to insure mental health, the GAP states, "require the full protection for all citizens of"

"The right to safety and security of the person
The right to citizenship and its privileges
The right to freedom of conscience and expression
The right to equality of opportunity."

To secure these rights governments are instituted among men. Our purpose must be so to prod our government that it will secure these rights to all of its citizens.