RECENT discussions at the UN on freeing colonial peoples emphasize an ever recurring pattern. Recorded (and unrecorded) history is a long story of displaced persons. The settling of America and the displacement of the Indians is one example, which, perhaps, we would prefer to forget. Every nation has had its period of oppression, and then, sad to relate, has often bitterly oppressed a weaker neighbor, with the result that sometimes thousands, sometimes whole nations, have been pushed from their homelands. Plausible reasons have always been advanced to justify this forcible appropriation, and the so-called "protection" of the original occupants. But regardless of the reasons given, the basic one is always land—the right of the use of which is essential if people or nations are to live, or even to exist. All the wars in history have been fought for this right. It is difficult to see how talks about peace can accomplish anything when the basic cause of war—the use of land—remains unsolved in every civilized nation.

The result of oppression in individual lives has been observed by many of us as "DP's" have come from European shores, suitcase in hand, leaving all else behind. Often they have been grateful just to be alive at all. Several hundred years ago there were other "DP's" who came to these shores. They were mostly what is called "whites," a large proportion being from the northern European countries—but they too mere refugees. They came for many reasons—personal, religious and political. History cannot deny that they were welcomed and peaceably accepted by the natives—the Indians.

Although these refugees came from what was considered an older and more enlightened civilization, they failed to discern that there were, in the primitive culture of the Indians, fundamental, natural and moral beliefs equal to or superior to the somewhat timeworn and conflicting views they brought with them.

Among the beliefs generally observed by virtually all of the Amer-

(Continued on page 15)
ican Indian tribes, was one which was passed over and unappreciated by those who came to possess this new land. It was a fundamental principle regarding the land itself—that it belonged to the tribe, or community—and the individual retained his use—right only so long as this was properly exercised. No individual or group of individuals could own land. Land was for use—it was not private property. The Indian's ancient belief was that the land was the mother who provided food for her children, and that it was free and belonged to all. Its attributes, the streams and forests, also were necessary to existence and could not be appropriated or owned.

Occupancy and use constituted the only tenure recognized. The privilege terminated if the land was not used or was improperly used. The Indian therefore could not understand the white man's desire for accumulation of more land than one individual could possibly use—for hundreds, yes, even thousands of acres, in some instances. Worse still, this land was often allowed to lie unworked or unused, or was wastefully used, as in case of forests. This caused one of the great misunderstandings in the treaties with the Indians. They did not know how to sell the land, they were only trading the use—therefore they and the white men were always at cross purposes.

The Indian always has had, and continues to have, reverence and respect for land—he does not value it in terms of profits (speculation) as the white man does. The Indian's spiritual values and philosophies of life are a part of the land and actually rooted in it. Longfellow's "Hiawatha" sings of the lakes (waters) at the smile of the Great Spirit. That Great Spirit continued to smile until the white man, having completely appropriated most of the useable land, began to pollute the streams, waste the soil and strip the forests. The Indians observed sadly this newcomer who had not only seized more land than he could use, but was now well on the way to squandering all the gifts of nature. (The destruction of our forests and wild life, and the waste and pollution of streams, was not checked until the early 1900's when Theodore Roosevelt pressed for national conservation laws.)

How the first settlers felt about the land may strangely be a warning to us. Our greatest danger may be in the indifference we feel for that which is the very base of our existence. It is hard for us, a nation with the highest standard of living, to admit that there may be other peoples, including the Indians in our midst, who regard their way of life as more desirable than ours. It seems irreconcilable that the "refugees" who came to this land to seek freedom should in turn have denied it to the occupants already here, only because their standards were simple, natural and different.

Many undisputed authorities, mostly of non-Indian ancestry, concur that the Indians, if they had not been intruded upon and "benefited" by the European civilization, would have developed a more moral and spiritual civilization of their own—a civilization in fact that would have more nearly approached the "ideal" because of their more correct approach to the use of land. Even the West, to which the Indians were gradually pushed, does not fully appreciate their culture nor recognize their ability to survive displacement, oppression and the persistent appropriation of their lands, with treaty after treaty made only to be broken. These treaties to the Indians conveyed perpetual rights to use of the land "so long as the grass grows and the water runs." They did not then know that the white man could cause the grass to cease to grow by his
improvident and wasteful methods (dustbowls of the 30's); that he would impound and waste water—building dams so that such tribes as the Pimas in Arizona would be deprived of their natural water rights and live in poverty, while the water they needed and were entitled to was diverted to recreation and "fun culture." The Indian simply cannot understand this unjust use of natural rights. We wonder if he should try. A tribe known as the Utes was pushed on to a wasteland. Then when it was found to be valuable the white men tried to reappropriate the land, bullying and browbeating the redmen again—but this time the shoe was on the other foot.

There may be nothing to be gained in recalling a record of occupation and conquest which has long since been justified in the textbooks, and quickly and conveniently forgotten. In the long panorama of time such changes are quietly overlooked, like a family skeleton in the closet, particularly by everyone not directly involved. We are concerned here only with a brief conjecture as to the degree with which a conquering people can (or is willing to) adapt and support whatever is worth perpetuating in the culture of the conquered.

The Indians respected, far more than many of the civilized nations, the wisdom that should come with age. Their government (council) was far more democratic and virile than many of the ruling groups in Europe at the same time. Even today the surviving tribal councils are more representative than many of our municipal, state and national governmental bodies. The Indian has suffered long, but still he maintains much of his dignity, despite displacement, broken treaties, and almost total appropriation of the land which he never presumed to own exclusively, even when it was within his power to reach out and possess.

In tribal customs a man was judge rich, not according to what he kept for himself, but by what he gave away. If harvests were good, everyone had enough—if not, no Indian held anything back while others were in need. He cannot cast off in a few years or even in several generations, the customs of hundreds of years, and cannot accept the white man's mad ambition for material possessions or the desire to acquire land beyond his needs.

Perhaps the Indian's attitude has given him the strength and power to survive, and his strong reverence of the land as the possession of all men may eventually influence his white brother to a better way of life—even to the recognition of what land really is and why it should never be the exclusive property of any one man. We can only hope that this part of his culture will permeate ours and eventually that of the whole world, so that we shall all be benefited thereby.

Many Americans have fractional Indian ancestry, especially those of Pre-Revolutionary origin, though they are seldom aware of it. Mrs. Anderson, who is director of the Denver extension of the Henry George School, is among this number, and accepts her heritage with understandable pride.