NOWHERE TO GO

To lose your home at eighty means a great change. Mrs. Ste-nyard and Mr. Tatum have lived in their houses for over 20 years. Many of the houses in their block are already torn down. Large open spaces stretch between the few remaining houses. There is an emptiness, a kind of sadness, about their streets.

Not a hint of all the living— the homes and families, the people and the buildings — remains, only little pieces of glass, and tin folded into the bare ground.

Those people more acutely aware of the transit problems in the bay area perhaps do not stop and feel this sadness. Many people will benefit from the new system. Nothing lasts forever anyway.

Mrs. Ste-nyard and Mr. Tatum have worked hard and accepted the responsibility for their own lives. They are property owners and taxpayers and have been financially responsible citizens of Oakland.

Statements have been made that Oakland has a relocation program for the people BART displaces from their homes. Neither Mrs. Ste-nyard nor Mr. Tatum

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photos by Lynn Phipps
NOWHERE TO GO

TWO FLATLANDS RESIDENTS FACE "PROGRESS"
AS BART MOVES TO TAKE THEIR HOMES

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have been contacted by any relocation agency.
BART and the city of Oakland both refuse to accept responsibility for these people. The money offered them by BART is inadequate; it cannot begin to replace their homes. They are too old to get loans, they cannot afford to make house payments with their incomes. It is frightening to think of working hard all your life and then to lose what you have gained—without adequate compensation. This is the kind of problem that only grows bigger and snowballs.

Mrs. Sneed, a neighbor of Mrs. Stenyard and Mr. Tatum said, "This block here—most everyone owned their house before they started demolishing. Some of our friends got very little for their property and now they're having a hard time trying to maintain the property. They paid such high prices for what they're buying, that now they don't have the money to care for it." Mrs. Sneed also pointed out, "They call this the slum or the ghetto, but they don't have a special tax that's cut. It's only recently that we started to get anything around here for our tax dollar. At least in their old age they should be given another house!"

Most of the houses still standing are owned by people who refuse to sell, because they know there are no houses in Oakland available for the money BART is offering.

Mrs. Betty Stenyard
Age 85

"I moved into this house in 1946, January 18th. Twenty years in the same house. And I sure hate to get out of it. I was born in 1881, about 90 miles from Greenville, then moved to Greenville about 1935. I started working in the cotton fields and worked my way through school a little, which is what I did. Then I was working in the cotton fields. I'd never worked in a hospital before. It was the time of war and they need help, I liked it fine. I worked at the hospital three years, two months and two weeks. After I quit at the hospital, I went back to work at the harvest, and worked there until I quit in 1953 when I caught pneumonia.

"We worked crop down at the side of Fresno, about 30 or 40 miles from Fresno. I'd go down and stay a month, and come home and stay another month. We'd go down on the bus. Sometimes it at four in the morning to catch that bus, in the frost and the cold. One thing happened that had never happened to me before—down there we slept in tents, something I'd never done in my life.

"I'm feeling fine today. So far my garden is good, and I'm eating and doing good. Can't ask for more than that. I don't have no complaint—except that there's not enough money.

"I've been in this house since about '43, got pension in '55. I worked at the Navy Supply base from 1912 to 1955. Got a pension, got a little something.

"I was born in Danville, Kentucky, about 145 miles from Louisville. In 1887, not 1927, 1887. So I've got a little age on me—79. I don't drink but I do smoke my pipe. I don't fool with wine, though, you don't see no wine bottles round here. I was a Pullman porter for awhile, been around everywhere. Did that about 21 years—around 1912, something like that. Don't recall things like that too well.

"I don't have any relatives here—none but myself. My closest relatives are my wife's people—I have a niece in Los Angeles. Have no people of my own.

"BART is causing me lots of discomfort in my having to move. I haven't moved yet of course but I've got to. I haven't got a place to move yet—they haven't segregated me out. They have given me the date to move your. The money they offered me isn't enough but I'll have to do with it. I would buy one corner of house."

Mrs. Sneed explained what BART had done: "Mr. Tatum has actually been pressured to move. BART gave him false statements. A man came and promised him a house with wall to wall carpeting, plus $7,200. He signed the property over, but then he found out the statements were untrue. This would be too down now if his niece hadn't come and stepped in."

"I hate to leave this house, Mr. Tatum said, puffing on his pipe and looking around, "... been here so long."

BART says they are giving the highest possible values on these houses. Mayor Reading says they can't pay high premium. The Homeowners and Tenant Association and the Fresno Neighborhood Council are group in West Oakland that are trying to deal with these problems. Nothing is done soon, the matter will probably be taken to the courts. If the court gives higher value then the people will be better able to relocate.

Something must be done by someone, something SHOULD be done. The problem is being created now. It can be solved now—like other problems, will be put off until it can no longer be ignored. If Oakland can look the other way while the harvest of peoples lives is being snatched away, Oakland only preparing for her own bountiful harvest.