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## Book Review - Raising Our Voices, Breaking the Chain: The Imperial Hotel Occupation as Prophetic Politics

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## Off the SHELF

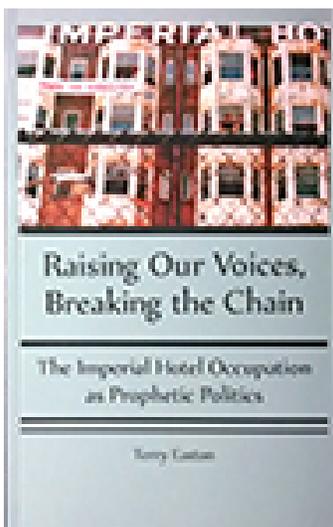
### **Raising Our Voices, Breaking the Chain: The Imperial Hotel Occupation as Prophetic Politics**

by Terry Easton (The Open Door Community Press, 2016: ISBN 9780692667156, \$10.00 suggested donation)

In June, 1990, in downtown Atlanta, eight activists from People for Urban Justice (PUJ) broke into the abandoned, derelict Imperial Hotel, an eight-story, early twentieth-century structure owned by John Portman, a real estate investor. PUJ's intention was to hang a "House the Homeless Here" banner they hoped would bring much needed attention to Atlanta's homeless population and the need for affordable housing—Single Room Occupancy—not temporary shelter. At the same time, the City of Atlanta and its business leaders were spending profane amounts of money on the renovation of Underground Atlanta, the building of the Georgia Dome, and Atlanta's 1996 Olympic bid. When the banner was hung, no one came to arrest the activists or ask them to leave. The break-in was intended as a half-day protest but instead turned into a 16-day occupation. In the two weeks that followed the break-in, many homeless people moved into the hotel, cleaned out debris, and created living spaces. Local churches and volunteers provided daily meals to the occupants and activists, and local reporters and politicians were forced to take notice.

In *Raising our Voices, Breaking the Chain*, Terry Easton tells the story of this occupation by PUJ, the political arm of the Open Door Community. The Open Door Community is a residential Christian community that provides help to the homeless and practices social justice activism

through prophetic politics which demands that members use their bodies to dramatize situations that usually go unnoticed and are in conflict with cultural values—homelessness, for example. The Atlanta Way, on the other hand, has historically been for Atlanta business interests and politicians to avoid those striving for justice and to keep protests out of the limelight. The occupation of the Imperial Hotel put prophetic politics right up against the Atlanta Way. Easton relates this confrontation and struggle from the viewpoint of the activists and triangulates archival sources with interviews from multiple people who participated in the occupation.



What transpired between June 18 and July 3, 1990, is a story of the courage and determination of activists and homeless people that set in motion a change in the way the City of Atlanta and the business community react to homelessness and housing. Easton details the players on both sides and keenly relates the story as it transpired. He also tells of the relationships that

were forged and the sometimes opposing goals of activists who have housing and the homeless they are fighting alongside.

The book includes biographies of the "Imperial Eight" who originally broke into the hotel and a timeline of the occupation. This story would benefit those studying recent Atlanta history and politics, religious activism, homeless populations, and affordable housing issues, especially Single Room Occupancy (SRO).

*Susan Clay is Map and Government Documents Original Cataloger at University of Georgia*