In this book, a key concept is positionality, the understanding that our life experiences and practices are deeply entangled with the ways we see the world. Given the importance of this idea to our work, it seems appropriate to share something about the journeys that have led to the production of this book while acknowledging those who have helped cultivate our thinking.

From Alison

My path began during my undergraduate education, where many of my courses probed the exploitations brought on by corporate globalization. I found opposition to that exploitation, as well as a deep sense of joy, in a place-based environmentalism emphasizing connection to the natural world. At the same time, my coursework highlighted resistance among poor communities of color while criticizing well-intentioned outsiders’ problematic reform efforts. It seemed that lessening my own resource use might decrease the need for exploitation while respecting, but not interfering with, communities’ struggles.

I learned to do this while living in an intentional community as a graduate student at UC Davis. I “put my hands in the soil” of our organic gardens and learned to cultivate food. Evenings were filled with shared meals, often followed by conversations lasting into the night. I’m grateful to have experienced firsthand the desire for ecological sustainability and deep social bonds that can arise from growing and sharing food. I also acknowledge that I, and those with whom I shared this experience, hailed predominantly from white and middle-class backgrounds. Even then, I knew that there was something about this way of life that rarely worked for people of color.
My early research arose from my personal and political interest in place, examining its relationship with meaning-making processes and power. This interest grew as I learned about the environmental justice movement. In contrast to movement leaders’ claims that its emphasis on place was in conflict with the environmental movement, place was essential to the kind of environmentalism I had been trying to live. I wanted to understand how activists could combine place-based environmentalism with antiracism. I moved to Oakland, where I had heard such efforts were emerging.

There I met a group of activists willing to share their work with me who, while not the subjects of this book, have deeply shaped my thinking. I am grateful to Jason Harvey (who loaned me his phrase “will work for food justice”), David Roach, Dana Harvey, Leroy Musgrave, Will Scott and the Scott Family, Charlotte Coleman, Ted Dixon, Xan West, and Jada White.

Additionally, I have found supportive communities of scholars including my dissertation committee (Tom Beamish, Jim Cramer, Julie Sze, and Kimberly Nettes), the Environmental Justice Project (Jonathan London, Marisol Cortez, Raoul Lievanos, and Tracy Perkins), the UC Multicampus Research Group on Food and the Body (especially Julie Guthman, Melanie DuPuis, Carolyn de la Peña, Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern, and Christie McCullen), my writing group (Joan S. M. Meyers, Dina Biscotti, Julie Collins-Dogrul, Jen Gregson, Macky Yamaguchi, Lori Freeman, Julie Setele, and Jaime Becker), and my colleagues at the University of the Pacific (Marcia Hernandez, Ethel Nicdao, George Lewis, and Ken Albala). Kari Norgaard has been an incredible mentor, colleague, and coauthor, helping me think through the framework for this book. Additionally, it is rare that a well-known scholar reaches out to a graduate student, but Julian Agyeman has been extremely supportive, eventually suggesting we collaborate on this project. I am deeply grateful for his guidance and positive attitude throughout. Thanks also to Natalia Skolnik and my partner Aaron Simon for their genuine interest in this work, as well as my family, Penny, Michael, and Matty Alkon, for their love, good humor, and encouragement.

From Julian

In the early 1980s, I was a geography teacher in Carlisle, England. Carlisle sits at the northern edge of one of Britain’s most beautiful regions, the Lake District. This is Wordsworth country, the place of England’s
highest mountain, Scafell Pike, and its biggest lake, Lake Windermere. It is a place of amazing beauty in every season but it’s a place that also perked my interest in race, ethnicity, and space. I always wondered why, when leading field trips to engage students in the very visible glacial history of the area, people would stop and stare. I also wondered why there were so few other visitors (and even fewer residents) that looked like me, a person of color in charge of a white group of students. What I didn’t know was that at the same time, Guyanese-born British photographer Ingrid Pollard, who became a good friend, was having similar experiences in the Lake District, and other rural spaces.

I chose to set up an organization to investigate these exclusive English “white spaces” in 1988. The organization, the Black Environment Network, of which Ingrid was also a founder, is still active today, and is Britain’s only minority-founded environmental organization. I also began to investigate this theme through my popular writings and TV programs during the 1980s and early 1990s. I took a more academic slant in my 1997 book chapter, written with then PhD student Rachel Spooner, called “Ethnicity and the Rural Environment” in *Contested Countryside Cultures*, edited by P. Cloke and J. Little. In 2006, Sarah Neal and I coedited a book-length investigation of what had become known as “rural racism” in *The New Countryside? Ethnicity, Nation and Exclusion in Contemporary Rural Britain*. Rural racism became the Black Environment Network’s equivalent of “environmental racism” in the United States. It was the first real framing of environmental (in)justice in Britain.

Ingrid Pollard’s way of expressing her feelings about her experiences was to produce a series of celebrated photographs entitled *Pastoral Interludes* of herself and others, including me, in rural English landscapes. In doing this, she helped to transgress the notion that we, as people of color, were “out of place” in the English countryside. Her work draws us in to view a moment of apparent disjuncture, of rupture between the black body and the (English) rural setting. With her inclusion of written text in her pictures, Pollard challenges the notion of a disjuncture and details the experience of living the disjuncture.

This, in a nutshell, was the beginning of my academic career. This was my experience with environmental (in)justice, which I’ve developed in different ways in all my writings since the 1980s, culminating in the concept of “just sustainability” which Bob Bullard, Bob Evans, and I described in our 2003 book *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press) and which I describe more fully in my 2005 book *Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of*
Environmental Justice. It is also the concept that bought Alison and me together. One of the great joys of being an academic is having bright, keen students chew over and reshape things that you have shaped. I’d heard about Alison’s PhD research at UC Davis and the fact that she was using the “just sustainability” framework to investigate two farmers markets in the Bay Area. We finally met at the 2007 American Association of Geographers conference in San Francisco and began to hatch this project. I thank Alison for opening my eyes to the world of food justice as that bridge between social justice and environmental protection that I call “just sustainability.”

In closing, we’d both like to thank all of the chapter authors, series editor Robert Gottlieb, Clay Morgan at the MIT Press, our editorial assistant Tufts student Laura Tolkoff, and our anonymous reviewers, each of whose hard work is reflected in this book.