Preface and Acknowledgments

In the fall of 1997 my wife Helen and I paid a final visit to her childhood home in Grand Forks, North Dakota. That April, after a brutal winter marked by eight major blizzards, the Red River of the North had overflowed its banks, flooding Grand Forks and forcing the evacuation of almost the entire population. My in-laws, whose basement had been flooded, were able to clean up and make repairs, but they had had enough of North Dakota winters. The blizzards and flood of 1996–1997 had been the last straw. They had sold the house and were moving to Florida. Although Helen had lived in the East for many years, the fact that she would never again come home to Grand Forks was painful.

Her sorrow was but a dim flicker of the enormous loss experienced by many Grand Forks residents. Although my in-laws gave up their house voluntarily, for others there was no choice. Low-lying areas along the Red River would be converted into green space to restore a natural floodplain. The homes would be condemned, bought by the city, and razed.

We walked around Lincoln Park, one of these doomed, deserted neighborhoods, and saw an eerie landscape. Like a scene out of a post-apocalyptic science fiction movie, block after block of tidy, suburban-style homes, the embodiment of the American Dream, all of them damaged but many still upright, stood silent and boarded up. On many of the condemned houses, the owners had spray-painted messages, epitaphs for an existence washed away. One house bore a message all the more poignant because of its simplicity: THIS WAS A HOME.

I thought of those houses and their exiled inhabitants when in August 2005 large sections of the Gulf Coast, including New Orleans, were devastated by Hurricane Katrina. More than a million people were displaced. For many New Orleanians, there would probably not be any
home to return to as the city considered converting especially flood-prone neighborhoods into open space.

The victims of natural disasters experience an extreme form of displacement in which they are uprooted not only from a physical house and neighborhood, but also from social networks associated with these places. Displacement is not just the result of natural disasters. War, land expropriation, ethnic cleansing, and massive infrastructure projects have displaced whole populations around the world. In the United States, urban renewal programs during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s displaced hundreds of thousands of city dwellers, many of them African-Americans or white ethnics, and demolished historic neighborhoods throughout the country. Today, municipalities, eager to bring in private development and increase tax revenues, wield the power of eminent domain to remove homeowners and small businesses. Gentrification drives low- and moderate-income residents out of booming cities.

Displacement also occurs in a subtler way. Although individuals may not be forced out of a place they inhabit, work in, or like to visit, that place can change so radically as to become more or less unfamiliar or even hostile. This happens when employers move to another town and local prosperity is replaced by economic decline, as has happened to old industrial cities like Syracuse, New York, where I now live. It also happens when a place is ruined by natural disaster, ecological degradation, or unchecked exploitation of resources, as when clear-cutting razes an old-growth forest or when, after 9/11, parts of New York City were blanketed with potentially toxic dust and individuals felt unsafe even in their own homes. A place can also be radically transformed when sprawl or other development eliminates historic structures, farms, forests, or natural habitats. Finally, rising global temperatures may radically alter many natural landscapes beyond recognition.

Several years ago, Helen and I were driving in my hometown of Manhasset, Long Island. I distractedly took a wrong turn and found myself on a completely unfamiliar street with expensive new homes. After a few disorienting moments, I realized with a visceral combination of shock, sorrow, and anger that we were in what had been Manhasset Woods. This was a small forest where my brother Joe and I had gone on many childhood adventures, often accompanied by our dog, Samba. Although I hadn’t been to Manhasset Woods in many years and no longer even
lived in Manhasset, the little forest seemed to be a given, an essential part of my town and its character. I never even thought much about who owned it or what they planned to do with it. It seemed a fixture in the landscape, an indispensable touch of wild nature in an otherwise built-out suburb. When I realized the woods were gone, I felt as if a piece of my world had been torn away from me. Manhasset has not seemed quite the same since.

Many of these examples of displacement and transformation of the landscape are manifestations of what I describe in this book as a crisis of place facing the United States and perhaps much of the rest of the world. Rampant development, unsustainable exploitation of resources, environmental degradation, and the commodification of places are ruining built and natural landscapes, disconnecting people from their surroundings, and threatening individuals' fundamental sense of place. Meanwhile, preservationists, including many environmentalists, respond with a hard-line, counterproductive stance that rejects virtually any change in the landscape. I offer an alternative to this polarized, often deadlocked politics of place by proposing a regional, democratic approach to land-use policy. Such an approach, which I call the working landscape, attempts to embrace, within a regional context, both the useful transformation of places—what I call founding—and the preservation of their character.

Like most first books by academics, this one was long in the making and grew out of my doctoral dissertation. The origins of this project in fact go all the way back to my two years at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, where I received a Master in Public Affairs in 1992. There I studied domestic environmental policy and became increasingly interested in land-use issues, including the debate over logging of the old-growth forest in the Pacific Northwest, one of the main case studies in this book.

My interest in land-use issues and in the concept of place itself merged with my interest in political theory when I began a doctoral program in Harvard's Department of Government. Drawing on political theory and then geography, I began to develop a deeper conceptual understanding of place and space.

Meanwhile, my desire to write on land-use issues was enhanced by six developments, in addition to the evolving Northwest timber debate,
that have profoundly shaped the content of this book. The first was the
growth of the environmental justice movement, which challenged envi-
ronmentalism’s traditional anti-urban bias and often single-minded focus
on wilderness. It brought minorities and working-class people into the
environmental movement and championed a participatory democratic
approach to land use. The second was the explosion of sprawl with
the recent housing boom that began in the 1990s. Landscapes were
obliterated with little regard for preservationist values. Communities
and government seemed powerless to fend off sprawl, even as individuals
mourned the loss of familiar surroundings and even as inner cities suf-
fered disinvestment while the countryside was paved over. The third was
the rise of New Urbanism, a deeply flawed but still promising approach
that offers higher-density, mixed-use planning as an alternative to sprawl.
The fourth was the collaborative conservation movement, an effort—
based largely in the American West—to bring local environmentalists
and resource interests together to democratically manage watersheds
and other ecological regions and try to combine ecosystemic values with
continued harvesting of resources. Fifth, there was the 9/11 tragedy, par-
ticularly the brutal attack on the World Trade Center. As someone who
had worked in Lower Manhattan and had grown up just outside of New
York City, the destruction of the Twin Towers affected me on a deeply
personal level. Moreover, the rebuilding of Ground Zero offered me a
fascinating opportunity for observing how we conceptualize place and
approach land-use politics. Finally, there was Hurricane Katrina and the
crisis of displacement that followed. Katrina occurred after I had com-
pleted the first draft of this book. However, one should not underesti-
mate the significance of this event as an indication of the profound
importance of place, an importance underscored by loss.

My ideas were also fundamentally shaped by a development in my
own field of study. This was the rise of the environmental political
theory, or EPT, community in the United States, a process with which I
was closely involved. Through the work of John Meyer, Timothy Luke,
and others, including myself, what had been a scattered group of scholars
working outside the mainstream of political theory became a community
of academics meeting regularly, sharing ideas, and profoundly influenc-
ing one another’s research and teaching. Today we have both a work-
shop and a section at the annual meeting of the Western Political
Science Association. Our gatherings have also been joined by EPT scholars from as far away as the United Kingdom and Australia. We have, as a community of scholars, worked to reverse the scandalous neglect of environmental politics by mainstream political theorists. We have also interrogated the unexamined assumptions and principles of environmentalism, in the interests of intellectual curiosity and honesty and out of a desire to generate a more philosophically robust basis for ecological responsibility. This critical stance underlies the arguments in this book.

All of the aforementioned experiences, issues, events, and intellectual threads have found their way into this volume. However, what has shaped this book even more profoundly is the incredible support and assistance I have received from so many people over so many years. Since the roots of this book go back to my time at Princeton, I would like to thank the instructors there who nurtured my interest in environmental and land-use politics: Clinton Andrews, Hal Feiveson, Frank von Hippel, Michael Danielson, Steve Brechin, and especially Julian Wolpert, who gave me enormous encouragement and got me interested in geography. At Harvard as well I received invaluable assistance, support, and criticism from my instructors. I am especially indebted to my dissertation committee. Dennis Thompson was my intellectual conscience, steering me away from excessive jargon and toward focus and philosophical rigor. Jill Frank was a thorough, careful reader and commentator who encouraged me to develop concepts and principles out of my case studies rather than try to fit the case studies to predetermined ideas. Jill was also a mentor who provided an enormous amount of advice on writing a dissertation, navigating the job market, and combining parenthood with an academic career. Michael Sandel, my committee chair, has been an intellectual inspiration since my undergraduate days. His constant enthusiasm for my project meant a great deal. My entire approach in both the dissertation and the book is ultimately indebted to his guidance as my advisor and to his civic republican perspective on politics and society. Faculty members Bonnie Honig and Pratap Mehta, each of whom ran the Department of Government’s political theory colloquium, also provided valuable commentary on selected chapters that I presented. Finally, I owe thanks to my former undergraduate advisor, Claire Laporte, who urged me to stay in graduate school during my stressful first year.
I also benefited tremendously from the unparalleled intellectual environment and nurturing camaraderie provided by my fellow graduate students, many of whom made specific comments on my work. Here I would like to especially thank Michaele Ferguson, Sharon Krause, Patchen Markell, Sankar Muthu, Ben Berger, Chris Willemsen, Jennifer Pitts, Andy Sabl, Tamara Metz, Danielle Allen, and Thad Williamson. Michaele deserves special mention as a generous, loyal friend and a constant intellectual foil throughout my graduate days and over the years since. I also owe a good deal to my 1997–98 graduate fellowship at Harvard’s Edmond J. Safra Foundation Center for Ethics. There I had a wonderful, challenging year of heady seminars with the other graduate fellows—Nien-he Hsieh, Samantha Power, Evan Charney, and Angela Smith—and with the director of the graduate fellowship, Arthur Applbaum.

While writing the dissertation, I also greatly benefited from the willingness of Michael Anderson of the Wilderness Society, Jerry Franklin of the University of Washington, Linda Hagen of the U.S. Small Business Administration, Nels Hanson of the Washington Farm Forestry Association, John Poppino of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, and Rex Storm of Associated Oregon Loggers to answer my many questions about forestry.

My transition from graduate student to professional academic was in large part facilitated by my fellow EPT scholars, who showed interest in my work long before I even had a complete dissertation draft. I am particularly indebted to those who read and commented on numerous bits and pieces of the dissertation and book (often in the form of conference papers): John Meyer, David Schlosberg, John Barry, Tim Luke, Harlan Wilson, Sheri Breen, Kim Smith, Kerry Whiteside, Robyn Eckersley, Bill Chaloupka, Amy Lovecraft, Bob Paehlke, Susan Liebell, Joe Bowersox, Joel Kassiola, Breena Holland, Sandra Hinchman, David Camacho, and Mark Brown. John Meyer, a good friend, has provided especially valuable comments as well as career advice. He, David Schlosberg, and John Barry deserve special thanks for having read through the entire first draft of this book and offering voluminous and enormously helpful comments. This book also shows the profound influence of their scholarship. I cannot thank the three of them enough. Tim Luke, Harlan Wilson, Kerry Whiteside, Robyn Eckersley, Bill Chaloupka, and Joel Kassiola, senior
scholars in EPT, have been important mentors. Tim also prodded me to read more geography. Kim Smith deserves special mention for always urging me to be more productive and for enriching my perspective on place through her own innovative scholarship.

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Turning to those nearest and dearest to me, anything I say will be inadequate for all they have done, but I will try my best. My parents, Salvator and Gaetana, instilled in me a love of ideas and of nature and an unwillingness to accept injustice in the world. Both of them, who are educators, bear a good deal of responsibility for my financially unwise interest in an academic career. They are still a constant source of encouragement. My sister Fran and my brother Joe have been loving siblings, inspirations in terms of character and professional accomplishment, and intellectual partners who have shaped my ideas and values in subtle ways that I probably won’t ever fully appreciate. Fran, who lives in the Boston area, was a selfless rock during my graduate school years, even using her
day off from work to babysit my daughter Maja and free up some productive time for me when our nanny took several weeks off. She, along with my brother-in-law Tom and their children Tad and Kate, always welcomed me into their home, had me over for innumerable dinners, and helped me out during the numerous small crises of graduate school, whether it was a shortage of cash or of self-confidence. My in-laws, Phil and Trudy Jacoby, were also loving and supportive. My mother-in-law Trudy deserves special thanks for having actually read through the enormous tome that was the dissertation; she has been looking forward to the book version. Phil passed away quite suddenly in 2001. I will forever miss him and also miss his willingness to challenge me on my decidedly un-libertarian views on property rights.

Finally, to my wife, Helen Jacoby, and my daughters, Maja and Perina ("Peri"), I dedicate this book. Their love has sustained me throughout. Helen has gone the extra distance many, many times over, picking up more than her share of household and childcare responsibilities whenever deadlines approached, even though she was often exhausted from her busy job as a physician. She has been my most important companion and best friend, and has used her incredibly sharp mind to push me to refine my ideas and temper my habit of making sweeping, unfounded generalizations. She has been with me for over twelve years of this process, since the end of my graduate coursework, and has given her enormous love and support unconditionally.

My two girls arrived during key points in the evolution of this book and my academic career. I finished my dissertation during Maja’s first year, and Peri came along during my first year at Hamilton. Despite the pressure of simultaneously writing a book and teaching at a liberal arts college, I have done my best to be fully involved in their lives, from changing diapers to preparing lunches and dinners to building snowmen to going on hikes. The book would have probably been done a lot earlier had I put work before family, but in return I have proudly helped two incredibly wonderful kids grow up and have received from them a love that has kept me grounded, put my professional life in proper perspective, and also made me powerfully aware of what this project is really about—maintaining our direct engagement with those who share and enliven the places that we inhabit. This engagement with our fellow inhabitants is an important aspect of what it means to be fully human.
The Working Landscape