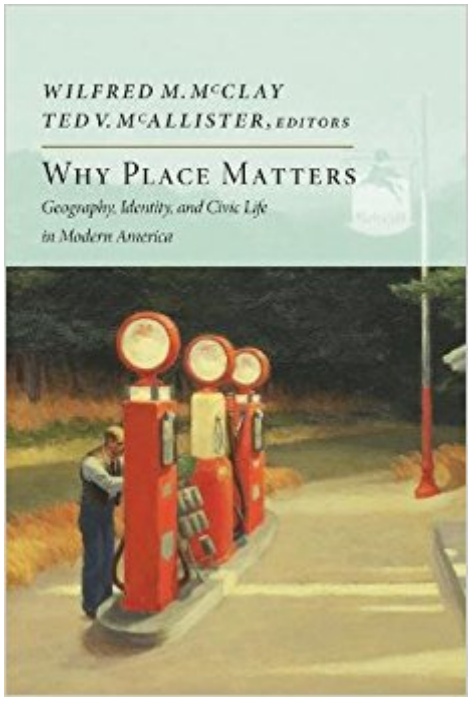
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# Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, And Civic Life In Modern America (New Atlantis Books)




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## Synopsis

Contemporary American society, with its emphasis on mobility and economic progress, all too often loses sight of the importance of a sense of “placeÃ¢â ¬Â• and community. Appreciating place is essential for building the strong local communities that cultivate civic engagement, public leadership, and many of the other goods that contribute to a flourishing human life.Do we, in losing our places, lose the crucial basis for healthy and resilient individual identity, and for the cultivation of public virtues? For one canÃ¢â ¬â„¢t be a citizen without being a citizen of some place in particular; one isnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t a citizen of a motel. And if these dangers are real and present ones, are there ways that intelligent public policy can begin to address them constructively, by means of reasonable and democratic innovations that are likely to attract wide public support?Why Place Matters takes these concerns seriously, and its contributors seek to discover how, given the American people as they are, and American economic and social life as it now exists—and not as those things can be imagined to be in some utopian scheme—we can find means of fostering a richer and more sustaining way of life. The book is an anthology of essays exploring the contemporary problems of place and placelessness in American society.The book includes contributions from distinguished scholars and writers such as poet Dana Gioia (former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts), geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, urbanist Witold Rybczynski, architect Philip Bess, essayists Christine Rosen and Ari Schulman, philosopher Roger Scruton, transportation planner Gary Toth, and historians Russell Jacoby and Joseph Amato.

## Book Information

Series: New Atlantis Books

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: Encounter Books (February 25, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1594037167

ISBN-13: 978-1594037160

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.3 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #221,640 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #219 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Urban Planning & Development #220 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > City Planning & Urban

Development  #413 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Civics & Citizenship

## Customer Reviews

"In this important book, insightful thinkers—from poets and philosophers to geographers and planners—explore one of the most disorienting results of our dazzling technological advances: an increasingly attenuated sense of place. Just decades ago, such a book would have been superfluous; today it is essential in a rapidly globalizing and digitizing world."BRUCE COLESenior Fellow, Ethics and Public Policy CenterFormer Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities"Both liberals and conservatives celebrate, each for their own reasons, the freedoms that modern life gives us, but we all too easily forget that to be liberated from one set of constraints is to become captive to another. Neither nostalgic nor polemical, Why Place Matters illuminates the “mind-forgÃ¢â ¬â„¢d manaclesÃ¢â ¬Â• of modern mobility, and in so doing teaches us why learning to love where we live—and, so to speak, learning to live where we live—is critical to human flourishing."ROD DREHERAuthor of The Little Way of Ruthie Leming"Cities are the crucibles of modern civilization. This unique and thought-provoking collection of essays will be crucial for helping anyone who cares about cities understand how they do or do not meet human needs in this new century. I will refer to this collection again and again."ROD GOULDCity Manager, Santa Monica, California"In our age of increasing rootlessness and digital disembodiment, this splendid book shows us how to think our way back, practically and philosophically, to the solid ground of place—the home, the neighborhood, and the city."STEVEN LAGERFELDEditor, The Wilson Quarterly

Wilfred M. McClay is the SunTrust Chair of Humanities at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and Ted V. McAllister is the Edward L. Gaylord Chair and Associate Professor of Public Policy at Pepperdine University.

Intriguing. As someone who has moved many times, I found this little book of essays to be engaging and insightful. Inspired me to study the Philosophy of Place in more detail.

I thought it was a very good book.

Great book! A nice addition to my collection!

An extremely important book, especially for our low information youth, in today’s simplistic "I’m just a citizen of the world" culture.

In any collection of essays, the most important objective is choosing the right topic that will open up and stimulate further discussion. The contributors on their part must represent diverse views, yet propose solutions that point in the same general direction.In this respect, editors Wilfred M. McClay and Ted V. McAllister achieved success in their excellent book, Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America. It is a collection that challenges the reader to enter into discussion, yet also points toward organic solutions outside the box of modern academia.The subject matter of this book is very important: the notion of place in an increasingly global and digitally disembodied world. It strikes on a profound chord since the sensation of rootlessness and anomie weighs heavily upon postmodern society. Place really doesn’t seem to matter.Modern technology and gadgetry have supposedly annihilated time and space. People no longer need places to call their own since it no longer matters where they live. Everyone is connected to their devices and supposedly "liberated" from the past constraints of traditions, family ties...and places.However, this book proves the contrary. As Wilfred McClay notes in the introduction, "We stand powerfully in need of such stable and coherent places in our lives--to ground us and orient us, and mark off a finite arena, rich with memory, for our activity as parents and children, as friends and neighbors, and as free and productive citizens."McClay and McAllister invite the reader to consider what happens when there is no sense of place and all places are made to look the same. This becomes all the more necessary in a polarized nation where points of unity are lacking. And one of these points is the actual physical places to meet, converse and associate. There needs to be prolonged and committed dedication to place. Otherwise, cities are reduced to empty shells and homes become that which the architect Le Corbusier famously called "machines for living in."The contributors lament the ruin of so many American cities by rationalistic, postwar planners. Brian Brown notes that, "the rational planning model was based on the mistaken notion that science could be substituted for the practical knowledge of ordinary citizens." He stresses the need for "the messy web of mediating institutions" such as families, churches and nonprofits that were sidestepped and normally help fill "the needs of belonging and participation."Christine Rosen points out the contradiction of modern mobility that avoids commitment to place as an expression of freedom, yet consents to be "tethered in novel ways--not to a hometown, or to a particular social background, but to our devices themselves" from which we are "never disconnected, and never really free from the

demands of daily life."The detachment from place is also the product of extreme individualism, since it incites people to withdraw from public or community obligations and engage only in the intensely narrow perspective of self-interest. Co-editor Ted McAllister explains how this failure to think beyond self-interest leads to an impoverished society where "the rich world of political and civil associations" is absent. Such a disconnect leads to a breakdown of civil engagement since one loses "the means of producing loyalty, a sense of duty, and a love of what is one’s own." It prepares the way for the bureaucratic state to intervene.Permeating the whole book is a respect for the organic nature of man. It is very natural for one to look for a place to call one’s own. It is a refreshing outlook that has long been abandoned by social planners and economists who see all things through an economic prism without any connection to society and place. In Why Place Matters, one finds a rare appreciation for beauty, providence and stewardship which are essential to making the concept of place attractive. The contributors tell of encouraging trends of people yearning for organic, place-centered practices that promote the "messy" way of doing things and which often prove much more effective overall.Why Place Matters is a book that stimulates thought on what place means in today’s world. Not every contributor will exercise the same attraction upon the reader since the angles do vary. However, the work was itself the organic outcome of conference talks which reflect this variety. America needs more books like this that go beyond the superficial discussion of trendy topics or political scandals. What is needed is deep discussion about place and all those things that really matter.John HorvatAuthor ofÃ  Â Return to Order: From a Frenzied Economy to an Organic Christian Society--Where WeÃ¢â ¬â„¢ve Been, How We Got Here, and Where We Need to Go

This collection deserves four stars, five withheld for only the few.Ah "place", the lamenting of which seems to be shared, though disproportionately, by both traditionalists and progressives. I highlighted five of the seventeen essays as especially moving and certainly worth the entrance fee; the other twelve of high quality, but more specific and detailed rather than broad and philosophical.This apolitical collection of essays reminds us of what our highly transitory culture is sacrificing when its upwardly mobile choose to remain unrooted. Herein is found smart critiques of cosmopolitanism as inherently inhuman and uninteresting along with powerful and persuasive cries for localism over centralism. I find this work highly important and relevant; if you are like me and yearn for the more humane community of ancestral village life to be somehow, and admittedly impossibly, coupled with modern medicine, this collection can help make sense of the compromise we have made.

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