

HEATHER TOSTESON

INVITATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS
Shifting Balance Sheets for All of Us

We assume many of the readers of this anthology will be, like the editors, birthright citizens who have found their own circuitous ways into an understanding of the importance of an open, thoughtful discussion of what citizenship and cultural attachment have come to mean to them—and what rights and responsibilities they see as flowing from this understanding. These experiences of birthright citizens are as crucial to the healthy, full integration of naturalized citizens into neighborhoods, communities and the nation as the experiences of the new citizens themselves, whose stories are at the heart of this book—for they are the holding environment in which these stories of migration and changing allegiances take on new meaning.

I share some of my own journey at the beginning of this collection because it is part of that holding environment and because the issue is personal for everyone involved, the citizen who is naturalized and the often unreflective birthright citizen who is brought into equal relation to her by that oath. What is the nature of that relationship? Who is responsible for it? Who benefits? Where does welcome fit in? Where does respect? Affection? Permanence? I believe we often do our best thinking if it arises from the density, complexity and immediacy of our own experience, that these abstractions—nationality, community, patriotism, democracy—which can arouse such ire and adamancy, mean more and differently when clearly reconnected with their vital and very messy sources in our daily lives.

Often the answers come through most clearly and mysteriously through stories because stories, as Jerome Bruner observes, invite interpretation, expose our normative assumptions and the emotional impact of their breeching, and, through the wholeness of action, transform a multiplicity of perspectives and motivations into one mysteriously meaningful experiential

