

**We are involved in many passionate debates at this time in American history, and one is about immigration.** In this issue, we feature the amazing story of Vu Thanh Thuy and follow her harrowing path from Vietnam and ultimately to Houston.

On the difficult issue of immigration policy, I am reminded of Miles' Law: "Where you stand depends on where you sit." I am writing this sitting at my desk in Allen Center, in the heart of one of our nation's most extraordinary universities. At some level, I bear responsibility for the quality of our student body, our faculty and our staff and what each of these components brings to the educational experience and our research contributions. Everywhere I turn, I see how immigration has benefited our university and therefore our city, our nation and indeed the world.

In our undergraduate student body, another Vietnamese immigrant, sophomore **Tram Thi Nguyen**, came to the U.S. as a young child in 2000. Her parents are commercial fishermen. Her family home was devastated in Hurricane Katrina, and they moved to Lafayette, La., where she was the first Asian student many of her classmates had seen. She undertook the task of teaching them about Vietnamese culture. We have at least 24 students, undergraduate and graduate, with the family name Nguyen (almost certainly all of Vietnamese heritage). I don't know all their stories, but they are likely mostly children of immigrants who arrived in the United States in the 1970s or later.

**Immanuel Saju Joy**'s parents came from India. Although both were trained in medicine, they have not been able to practice in the United States. Immanuel was named one of the top 100 high school level programmers in the 11th grade and now is a sophomore studying engineering at Rice.

From a different part of the planet, sophomore **Mekedelawit Tsegaye Setegne** moved to the United States from Africa at the age of 5. She embraces her Ethiopian culture and worked 20 hours per week through high school before enrolling at Rice.

**Arthur Vadim Belkin**, a sophomore at Baker College, is a dual citizen of the United States and Russia. While living in Russia, he had to conceal both his U.S. and Jewish identities. He participated both in the Columbia University Science Honors Program and in a summer internship program at Bauman Moscow State Technical University.



DAVID W. LEEBRON

## Our Enduring Immigrant Advantage

Last spring, a Rice graduate student, **Ismael Loera Fernandez**, was one of 30 students nationally awarded the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans. Loera Fernandez came to the United States with his family at the age of 11 and studied chemistry as an undergraduate at Emory University.

Every part of Rice reflects the importance of immigrants and our openness to international students, who often become the parents of American citizens. We are, for example, now enrolling the children and indeed some grandchildren of Rice graduates who came as foreign students. Twenty-two percent of our faculty members are foreign citizens, as are 18 percent of our staff. Our undergraduate population is now about 12 percent foreign students, as are 39 percent of our graduate students. These numbers don't count those who are naturalized citizens or permanent residents of the United States.

Many of us can identify with these stories, even if at some distance in the past. My grandfather on my father's side came to the United States as a young boy. His father never arrived, his mother remarried,

and he was adopted by his stepfather. Eventually, he became a doctor and a pediatrician, providing services to poor families in west Philadelphia.

Even in the small group of our college masters, seven of 21 are immigrants. Recently, when we set out to hire a chief information officer for the first time, we were fortunate to find **Klara Jelinkova**, who came to the U.S. from the Czech Republic at the age of 19 and studied at the University of Wisconsin. Our new provost, **Marie Lynn Miranda**, was born in Detroit, the daughter of immigrants from the former Portuguese colony of Goa. And I wouldn't want to omit my wife, **Ping Sun**, who came from Shanghai, China, as a young student to study at Princeton, the university that provided Rice's first president.

More than ever, this is the world of mobility we live in. From where I sit, this world is greatly to the advantage of the United States, where people from all over the planet come to find safety and opportunity. For Rice, it has become an essential part of building an extraordinary student body, an outstanding faculty and a remarkable staff committed to our mission.