ne of the most important transformations in the American society over the last four decades is the influx of immigration. In 2006, immigrants and their children accounted for one in four of the total US population. By all projections, America in 2050 will be much more racially, ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse than we have ever been since the founding of this nation.

This increasing diversity brings both opportunities as well as challenges, and I will focus today on the issue of race relations and social inequality, a topic of academic and personal interest to me. (Van then cites three recent incidents of prejudice experienced by minority students and faculty at Harvard). These examples highlight the continuing significance of race and class in American society today. Half a century after Brown vs. Board of Education and four decades after the passage of key Civil Rights legislations, America remains a fundamentally unequal society as ethnic and racial inequalities continue to persist across a range of outcomes, from educational attainment and wealth to civic and political participation to life expectancies and health outcomes.

However, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, America is also at an historical crossroads. Forty-four years ago yesterday on October 14, 1964, Martin Luther King Jr. became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on the Civil Rights movement. Three weeks from today, there is a chance that we will elect the first black president in the history of this nation. One cannot help but be amazed by the significant progress that has been made in the course of two generations and this speaks volumes to the promise and hope that America represents. It is this very sense of optimism that defines our nation as the beacon of hope for the rest of the world, especially for those who have come here to seek refuge in the face of persecution in their home country like my family. As a refugee, I have a profound appreciation for the opportunity that America has offered me and for the democratic principle upon which our nation was built. America is a functioning democracy that continues to be the envy of many nations around the world — a fact that we Americans too often take for granted. And yet as a social scientist, I am troubled by the deep cleavages along race, class, and gender lines that continue to divide us as a nation.

Let us be mindful that the future of our nation is in the collective hands of all of us — children of immigrants and natives alike from all socioeconomic, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Our mutual understanding and appreciation of each other’s experiences is crucial to our collaboration in tackling the nation’s most challenging problems — from rising economic inequality at home to ending two wars abroad. Let us take a moment in our encounter with each other everyday to appreciate the humanity that unites us instead of dwelling upon the skin color or social differences that divide us. If we were to see our differences as the source of America’s unique strength instead of its division, then Martin Luther King’s dream in 1963 can be realized, and not deferred, in our generation today, here in our blessed sanctuary, outside on our peaceful campus and hopefully everywhere else in America.

Soukhovetski proved himself to be a master interpreter of Mozart’s music. He demonstrated a maestro’s touch in portraying each of the subtle moods that the Austrian wunderkind penned into his music... Again, I simply sat back, closed my eyes, and let the pianist’s gossamer touch present a broad palette of musical visual imagery. “

On tour in Louisiana, Konstantin Soukhovetski, ’04, From The Advertiser, Lafayette, LS