



Eduardo Padrón

UPFRONT

SOMETIMES I WONDER WHAT SOMEONE FROM OUTER space would think of us. We are so often unintelligible to ourselves so it's difficult to imagine what those watching from afar would think. They might ask, "What on Earth are those people doing?"

They might conclude that we don't get along very well. "So many explosions, and my goodness, those ugly clouds. They're choking their planet." I'm not sure you can ascertain a financial meltdown from outer space but they might pick up the waves of anxiety wafting off the planet.

I'm not the only one applying science fiction to our planetary woes. In Hollywood's remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, once again the legendary Klaatu announces, "I come in peace," and again he is shot by frightened Earthlings. It was 1951 for those of us who remember the original Klaatu, and though he came in peace, Klaatu delivered the ultimate warning to his hosts: Find a way to live

Almost 60 years later, angry fissures in the Middle East and elsewhere have spilled new blood. We are inured to it; untimely death and atrocity are standard fare in the world to which Klaatu granted reprieve. But if the adults are still in need of supervision, look to the children for salvation.

I make a point of spending as much time with the students as I can. Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down with five students who were readying to leave for semesters in China and Costa Rica. It's a shame that Klaatu didn't meet these Earthlings. He would have been relieved and downright inspired, just as I was. Not only will the students pursue their major course of study abroad, but they will create and implement a service learning project.

On January 20, President Obama opened a new chapter in our nation's history, but one forged on a set of age-old values. He called for a new era of national service, of many hands reaching for a common good. Our students have raised their hands.

Helder is from Nicaragua and wants to clean up those deadly choking clouds. An environmental science major, he will teach children about preserving our habitat. He wants to "help to fix the big problems." Ulysses grew up in Haiti and hopes to complete a Ph.D. at MIT. But before he does that he'll be tutoring the children of Costa Rica in math and physics. Then there is Jorge, who's headed to China and a career in international business. "Business doesn't end in the U.S.," he says, "and there's a cultural evolution in the world that I want to be a part of."

Dreamers? No question, but don't knock it. The world is full of pragmatists and quite a few are living and dying in the world's hotspots. These students reflect a new and necessary awareness of the interconnectedness of both the natural world and all things man-made. They understand that the boundaries of nations and cultures are soon to be antiquated. When they can connect to a Facebook companion on the other side of the planet by a mouse click, what sense do these boundaries make?

Slowly but surely, their elders are catching on. Miami Dade College asks every student to master 10 learning outcomes that reflect

the goals of a broad liberal education in the early 21st century and a nation on the cusp of immense change. Among them is the ability to "demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultures, including global and historical perspectives;" the capacity to "create strategies that can be used to fulfill personal, civic, and social responsibilities;" and the understanding to "demonstrate knowledge of ethical thinking and its application to issues in society."

I am certain these students will fulfill the president's request. Maybe one of them will give us the next Google or breakthrough in cancer research. Most importantly, as they engage and embrace a world of differences, they cannot help but discover a new and necessary commonality.

Listen to Lina from Brazil, on her way to China: "With the knowledge we gain from this opportunity each of us can become someone special. We can be the person that tilts the balance in a person's life or changes the world in a special way."

Somewhere, Klaatu is smiling. **H**

Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón is president of Miami Dade College, the largest institution of higher education in the nation.

THE BOUNDARIES OF NATIONS AND DISTINCTIONS OF CULTURES ARE SOON TO BE ANTIQUATED.



in peace or we who value it will eliminate you and your planet. As the story goes, we were given a reprieve. "*Klaatu barada nikto*" in Gortian dialect, or "Give them a little more time."