Osama Bin Laden is very much a product of contemporary culture, stated Steve Coll at his lecture on March 8th, “we must take him 'out of the cave' and place him in the modern, globalized setting he belongs.” Coll centered his talk on the cultural and political circumstances that Bin Laden grew out of, tracing the roots of his illustrious father and older brother. Fredrik Logevall, Director of the Einaudi Center, introduced Coll, describing the subject matter as having “immense importance in terms of where national affairs are today and where they are going.” The talk was part of the Einaudi Center’s Foreign Policy Distinguished Speaker Series.

Steve Coll, President of the New America Foundation and staff writer for The New Yorker, gave the lecture "Osama Bin Laden and the Age of Globalized Terror" on Monday, March 8th. Coll, who has been writing about Osama Bin Laden since the 1993 World Trade Center bombings, described Bin Laden as a contemporary figure who came of age in a transnational, wealthy family.

Osama Bin Laden grew up in Saudi Arabia, one of 54 brothers and sisters. His father, Mohammed Bin Laden, built an empire with a post-war construction business. The Bin Laden children grew up in an affluent, transcontinental, technologically-advanced world; a world that Coll believes provided each child the "ability to discover who they were in the world." In 1967, Mohammed was killed in a plane crash, leaving the oldest brother, Salem, in charge of the family business. Coll described Salem as a blue-jeans-wearing, "charismatic" young man, who loved everything having to do with rock music and modern technology. Then, in 1988, Salem was killed in a plane crash. Osama, who had been a strong admirer of Salem, formed Al Qaeda nearly two months after his brother's death.

Coll described the Bin Laden's siblings as representing a full political spectrum. Osama belonged to the most conservative wing of the family, as he had been radicalized by many of his school teachers who were exiled members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Coll attributes
the success of Al Qaeda, in part, to Osama's childhood of global exposure and familiarity with modern technology. Bin Laden understood "the technologies of global integration" from his youth; his family invested in satellite communication technology even before cell phones were in existence. While serving as a junior executive at his father's company Bin Laden learned the importance of "building brands and marketing an identity," techniques he used to turn Al Qaeda into a brand name. Following Coll's talk there was a lively question and answer session, where questions were asked ranging from Osama Bin Laden's education to questions about the strength of Al Qaeda.