

Nation of Immigrants or Deportation Nation? **September 12, 2007**

On September 12, 2007, the Center for Human Rights and International Justice hosted Julia Preston, Pulitzer Prize-winning correspondent for the *New York Times*, in a conversation with Center Associate Director Daniel Kanstroom on the deportation of non-citizen immigrants from the United States. Preston focuses her work at the *Times* on immigration issues, and was previously a Bureau Chief and foreign correspondent for Latin America at *The Washington Post*. She is the recipient of numerous awards, and author of the forthcoming book *Opening Mexico: The Making of Democracy*.

Following introductory remarks by Center Associate Director Donald Hafner, Preston delivered an address on immigration in the U.S. that was grounded in her journalistic experiences with the stories of the affected, and framed within the recent Congressional attempts at reform of immigration law. She highlighted both the Mexican communities that are at the center of the immigrant surge, and the tensions that have existed throughout the history of U.S. immigration law between enforcing the border and the need for low-wage immigrant workers. In particular, Preston noted the recent expansion of harsh deportation policies that have, for example, separated women from their children for the crime of working in this country without legal documentation. She suggested that the crackdown on the hiring of undocumented workers is creating a “fugitive class” whose prospects upon entering this country are detention and deportation; that is, existence in a “constitutional netherworld” described in Prof. Kanstroom’s new book, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History*.

From his extensive research for *Deportation Nation*, Prof. Kanstroom delivered a broad presentation on deportation within the system of U.S. immigration law, including its social functions, history in U.S. law, and the numbers of people affected; approximately 1 million people are deported from the U.S. each year. Kanstroom explained that there are many more kinds of people facing deportation than one might imagine, including those who have held legal residency status in the U.S. He described several compelling stories of deportees, such as raids that occurred last year in factories in New Bedford, Massachusetts, during which families were torn apart and parents were sent to out-of-state detention centers inaccessible, for a time, even to their lawyers. He argues that there is a growing “internalized border,” meaning that even far away from typical enforcement areas such as the U.S.-Mexico border the mechanisms of enforcement developed there are being applied. He also suggests that the crisis in U.S. immigration related to deportations “border[s] on civil rights violations.”

The talk was followed by numerous questions from a large audience of Boston College students, faculty, alumni and other community members. Questions addressed such issues as the necessity of comprehensive immigration reform and comparisons between U.S. and European immigration systems, among others.