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## New Political Study Center? Turn Right at Berkeley

By [PATRICIA COHEN](#)

If you're interested in studying left-wing social movements like organized labor, civil rights or feminism, there are dozens of universities and colleges that have created special programs and research centers devoted to the subject. But hardly any similar institutions exist in academia for those looking for a place to study the right wing in America and abroad.

Now, with backing from an anonymous donor, the University of California, Berkeley, where '60s-era students stood atop a police car and ignited free-speech protests, is creating a Center for the Comparative Study of Right-Wing Movements. According to experts in the field it is the first of its kind in higher education.

"This is unique," said Paola Bacchetta, an associate professor at Berkeley and an editor of the collection "Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World." "There are no other centers that I know of."

Scheduled to open in the fall, the new center, which Lawrence Rosenthal will oversee, is affiliated with Berkeley's Institute for the Study of Social Change. "Part of the motivation is that it is an understudied area," Mr. Rosenthal said.

Mr. Rosenthal, who has written about similarities between former President [George W. Bush](#) and Prime Minister [Silvio Berlusconi](#) of Italy, notes that anti-Communism served as a rallying point for very disparate right-wing movements throughout the 20th century. But after the fall of Communism these movements spun off in different directions, toward nationalism, religious fundamentalism and libertarianism.

Americans have a tendency to view their own history and experience as unique, Mr. Rosenthal explained, which is why the emphasis on comparing the United States with Europe and Latin America is particularly unusual.

Lee Edwards, a fellow at the conservative [Heritage Foundation](#) and the author of "The Conservative Revolution," said that while more scholars had devoted attention to the right wing over the past decade or so, it was still a relatively neglected topic.

Mr. Edwards was wary of comparing the American experience with those of other countries. "One has to be careful with comparisons, though, because the so-called right wing or parties of the right can be much more extreme than what we have here," he said, adding, "The best comparison is with the Conservative Party of Britain."

Robert Paxton, a historian who is considered one of the world's experts on French fascism, emphasized, however, that "comparison doesn't necessarily imply similarities."

"It doesn't mean you're lumping them all together," he continued. In his view the comparative approach is extremely useful. "I think it's a very fertile ground if only to show up the differences" between conservatives here and abroad, he said.

For more than 30 years the right in America has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into education and research efforts, lending support to efforts like establishing an extensive network of research institutes outside of academia and pumping up efforts to teach Western civilization and American history on campuses. But little effort has been expended toward studying the movement's own history or putting it in a global context.

From which political direction the financing for this latest effort is coming is masked. The donor's request for anonymity may be more to ward off requests for other contributions than for political reasons. The donation, \$777,000, is relatively small, but enough, Mr. Rosenthal said, for the center to sponsor lectures, conferences and colloquiums; offer fellowships for undergraduate and graduate students; and publish papers.

One of the first efforts, said Ms. Bacchetta, who attended a planning meeting last week, may be a conference devoted to links between right-wing groups across borders. "Most of these right-wing movements have some kind of connections transnationally," she said. "Alliances across different countries take different forms." For example, she said, Hindu nationalism has branches in countries besides India, or right-wing religious groups in different countries might join together to oppose abortion.

Ms. Bacchetta insisted that researchers' own political orientation was irrelevant. "It's a question we always get asked," she said. "But we really like to think of ourselves as scholars in the academy," working on evaluating these groups without any agenda. "We're not a political organization."

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