

Merle Woo vs.
University of California

VICTORY!
Newsletter

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Issued by the Merle Woo Defense Committee, 2661 21st Street, San Francisco, CA 94110 (415) 864-1278

Woo Wins Free Speech Fight

Asian American Studies (AAS) lecturer Merle Woo will return on July 1st, 1984 to teach in the Department of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. Her case against UC was settled out of court on February 17, 1984. Woo accepted a two-year contract, \$48,584 settlement sum and \$25,000 attorney's fees.

Woo was terminated from AAS in 1982 for her criticism of the department and because she is a socialist feminist, a trade unionist and a lesbian. After two years of a militant, public fight, she and the Merle Woo Defense Committee (MWDC) celebrated at a party in San Francisco on May 19th. Excerpts from her victory speech are printed below:

Thanks To All

"Today we are celebrating an enormous victory. It is a grand and public victory and a vindication of many issues, including free speech, affirmative action and workers' rights.

We filed federal and state complaints charging violation of my First Amendment rights: free speech and association, and discrimination based on race, sex, sexuality and political ideology.

The MWDC, a coalition of women, people of color, gays and lesbians, students, staff, unionists and radicals, fought a nationwide battle showing that the conflict was political and not personal or "professional". There is a class struggle going on even though UC would like to hide the fact. Teachers are no different than other workers--there's management and there's us. And we fought management and won.

I can never thank the MWDC, all our supporters, endorsers, contributors and my organizations Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party enough for fighting for me and for the issues. Karen Brodine, MWDC National Coordinator kept the legal aspects and all the work coordinated, organized and on the right track.

We had a strong legal case, but UC was also very sensitive to the public pressure. The winning strategy was to try the case not only in the courtroom but also in the community. Out of the courtroom and into the streets!

Woo Victory Speech (continued)

Back at UC, I will be even more visible as a revolutionary Marxist than when I left. I will continue to speak out, making connections to other low-paid employees, other unions, standing up for free speech.

The right wing is on the rise, the new McCarthyism hits the workplace--and UC is no exception. To survive, we must all strive for labor solidarity. Many of us have been out on picket lines--for the Communication Workers of America, the Las Vegas hotel workers, the Amalgamated Transit Workers... We cannot allow management to break our unions, force concessions, fire us. My victory comes in a wave of rising resistance, and we are caught up in it, an active part of the challenge.

We all teach...and teaching is not confined to the classroom. This case was another forum...out of the classroom and into the streets!

We, together as public fighters, persuaders, educators, reached more people than one person could ever have in a lifetime of teaching. And the subjects we talked about! The majority of humanity--people of color, women, lesbians and gays, workers, unionists and radicals. Now there's a course that can change the world!



CELEBRATING THE VICTORY

The Merle Woo Defense Committee and over a hundred supporters enjoyed music, skits and delicious food and drink at the Victory Celebration, May 19th in San Francisco. Edgar Poma authored skits that skewered UC management. Brook and Barbara Dyskant led the crowd in songs and Leora Goren was disk jockey for dancing after the program. The hall was decorated with red dragons and the message was "Fight Back and Win!"

Statements By Supporters

Compiled by Jennings Gee

It was rare that a professor would face up to administrators at UC. Merle was fired for a multiplicity of reasons--her sex, her race, her sexuality, her class, her politics...The victory does not increase my belief in the legal system, rather it increases my faith in the strength of fighters and the on-going struggle. The MWDC taught me we must continue to work collectively, to share our knowledge and work together with our many differences.

Rachel Iskow
UC graduate, MWDC member

Statements by Supporters (continued)

Merle Woo inspired us to think actively and to consider the broader issues in education and society. It is important that UC and AAS provide a setting where one can speak out and voice their independent views as Merle did. It is a shame that AAS can't recognize this need for diversity and open discussion. This is the premise on which AAS was built.

Laura Ide
UC student, MWDC member

As a longtime activist on the Berkeley campus, I wish to congratulate Merle Woo. Her successful campaign against UC's arbitrary and discriminatory treatment will encourage all campus employees in their ongoing effort to establish decent wages and working conditions. I particularly look forward to the strong voice of Merle Woo on the Berkeley campus once again: both her students and fellow workers will benefit from her experience and determination.

Steve Diamond
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

Merle Woo took on a major struggle for free speech and against discrimination... The victory was a result of a well-organized and well-publicized defense based on an accurate analysis of how the justice system and the capitalist system works. The case reaffirmed my belief that principles, political analysis and collective action can and will bring about change.

Lynda Hirose
Community Worker
MWDC Supporter

It just goes to show that if you keep on fighting and get people to back you up, then you certainly stand a chance. For educators it is really important, because given all the cutbacks, more and more people are getting axed for a variety of reasons, especially lecturers...they really need to organize so they can get some decent working conditions and job security.

Randy Higa
Former AAS tutor
MWDC member

Merle Woo and the MWDC: Your Pacific Northwest supporters were ecstatic at your recent victory. You proved Goliath could stumble and fall on his proverbial face. And we heartily approve of celebrating our victories over bureaucrats, budget cutters and political censors--so waltz into your new job with confidence and tonight, all of you exercise your well-deserved free speech rights in the most rousing and boisterous victory party ever...

Seattle MWDC, Stonewall Committee for Lesbian and Gay Rights, Seattle Gay News, Asian Family Affair, Dorothy and Fred Cordova.



Merle Woo (center) and supporters demonstrate at a Public Employment Review Board hearing to protest the 4-year rule, which wipes out job security for most lecturers at the University of California.

Statements by Supporters (continued)

Congratulations to Merle! At a time when daring to struggle, daring to fight is hard, she's certainly an example for us all. I wish her all the luck in getting back on the job and staying in the struggle.

Michael Zinzun

Former Black Panther

Michael Zinzun Defense Committee, Los Angeles

This settlement is a wonderful victory for everyone who wants a University dedicated to the progress of the diverse human community that exists in our state and our country. Merle Woo's victory shows that if enough light is shed and enough steady principled pressure applied, the University can be forced to acknowledge its errors and correct its ways. Because some of us are willing and able to fight now, perhaps others will not have to go through so much in the future.

Nancy Shaw, Assistant Professor, fighting a free speech case against the University of California at Santa Cruz

Front Line of Freedom

by Merle Woo



Merle Woo is an Asian American poet and teacher. The following is her speech/poem delivered at the San Francisco Gay Pride march in 1981 - a speech that proved to be the political hit of the day. It was widely quoted afterwards and broadcast at San Francisco's Gay Pride and broadcast at Stock in Midwest. A virulent attack was provoked wide protest in defense of her gay publication, provoked a reaction against the lesbian/gay movement. She is currently fighting to retain her position at the University of California at Berkeley. Significant support has been rallied to defend her right to hold the ideas expressed so powerfully here.

Posters Still Available

"Front Line of Freedom" is Merle Woo's speech/poem delivered in San Francisco's Gay Pride march in 1981. Proving to be the political hit of the day it was widely quoted and broadcast at Stockholm's Gay Pride rally. But the acclaim was hardly universal. A virulent attack on Woo in Midwest, a reactionary gay publication, provoked wide protest in defense of her and her criticism of the racist, sexist elitism that plagues much of the lesbian and gay movement.

You can purchase your own beautifully reproduced 13"x19" poster. Send \$3.00 to the MWDC, 2661 21st St., San Francisco, California 94110.

ALSO AVAILABLE: An exciting history of Merle Woo's case in press coverage, speeches and other reprints. A handy reference for planning any free speech and discrimination fight! \$3.50. Order from the above address.

of my people in this country, who cannot immigrate because of race, sexuality, and political persuasion.

...ndisturbable.

...one may not be oppressed because of race, physicality, class, or age, and which he as its goal

Those on the Front Line of ...

models of hierarchy and exploitation and inferior.

I march, stand, and fight with socialist feminists because in its pursuit of theory and action, it is Revolutionary Feminism which is a fight for everyone who is oppressed and which he as its goal and which he as its goal the certainty that

community groups, and not people

...one may not be oppressed because of race, physicality, class, or age, and which he as its goal



Free Speech Cases . . . The Struggle Continues

by Karen Brodine

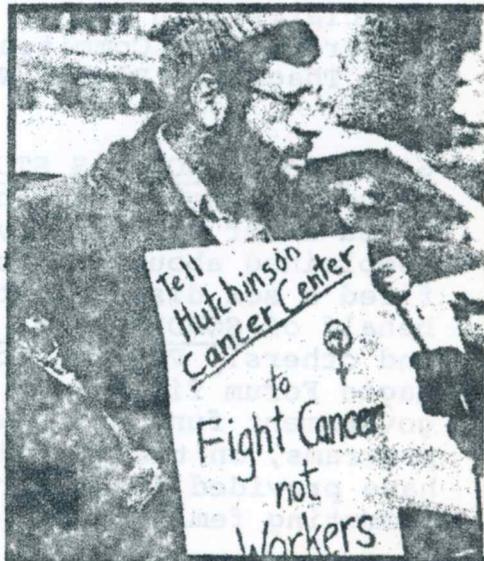
The MWDC has met, or heard of, many other people fighting against discrimination and censorship on the job:

NANCY SHAW, UC Santa Cruz, was denied tenure in spite of rave reviews by students and faculty. Considerations of political ideology, gender and sexual orientation intruded into her tenure review. Complaints have been filed against UC for denial of tenure. The Federal Economic Employment Opportunities Commission ruled on April 9, 1984, that UC was guilty of sex discrimination in its tenure denial. EEOC has begun informal meetings with the aim of avoiding court action. Contributions can be sent to the Nancy Shaw Legal Defense Fund, 347 Plateau Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA 95060.

CERCL, (Employee Committee for Equal Rights at City Light) in Seattle, was formed in 1983 by concerned women and minority workers in response to City Light's seven years of persistent discrimination against women electrical workers. Retaliation for objecting to discrimination is rampant at the public utility. Members of CERCL are demanding equal rights on the job for women, people of color, sexual minorities, the disabled and aged and victims of political ideology reprisals. CERCL is currently opposing the contracting-out of work to private contractors which will mean layoffs of women and minorities in the skilled trades. Contact CERCL at 1806 N.E. 65th St., Seattle, WA 98115.

On April 3rd, over 200 students demonstrated at UC Santa Clara against the firing of BRIAN MURPHY, an outspoken leftist instructor in political science. Supporters of Murphy believe he was fired because of his politics. Students said Murphy is the sixth well-liked instructor to be fired without explanation and they are seeking an end to tenure review secrecy.

HENRY NOBLE, socialist feminist labor organizer at the Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, continues to fight harassment and retaliation on the job. Low-paid workers at the Center have been battling for five years to organize and gain a contract, with Noble central in that fight. The National Labor Relations Board ruled that the Center had retaliated against Noble for his labor organizing, but the Center is appealing that decision. Letters of support for Noble are needed and can be sent to the Henry Noble Defense Committee, 2322 31st Avenue, Seattle, WA 98144.



Henry Noble, labor organizer

Free Speech Cases (continued)

KATHRYN VAN WORMER, feminist anti-racist professor at Kent State University, lost her bid before the EEOC to win her tenure battle. Kent State administrators waged a vicious attack against her, including rumors about her teaching. They complained that she expressed her progressive views too much in the classroom. Van Wormer had support from over 500 students and numerous faculty on campus.

MARIA ELENA "TOMMY" ESCARCEGA is waging a discrimination case against the Los Angeles School District. The District had hired her as a bilingual Teacher's Assistant. The day she was to begin work, her supervisor asked about her attire, and sexual orientation. When Escarcega answered she is a lesbian, the supervisor told her she was an inappropriate role model for children and fired her. The ACLU has taken on the case. For information, write c/o Escarcega, 3214 Larissa Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90026.



MITSUE TAKAHASHI, a high school teacher in Merced, California for 19 years, has filed a lawsuit against the school district for firing her. She was discriminated against on the basis of her sex, race and age. Her Defense Committee can be contacted at 6641 North Sultana Dr., Livingston, CA 95334.

In August, 1982, CLARA FRASER won a landmark sex and political ideology discrimination case against Seattle City Light. She won reinstatement, \$135,000 backpay and attorney's fees. Returning to work in November, 1982, Fraser has been the subject of constant harassment, retaliation and perpetual discrimination, as has anyone who associates with her or stands up for his/her own rights. The Clara Fraser Defense Committee can be contacted c/o Mary Ann Curtis, 4534 Thackeray Place, NE, Seattle, WA 98105.

Since 1982, WOMEN'S STUDIES at Cal State Long Beach has been under attack by the right wing. Three members of Women's Studies were fired after conservative legislators complained about the curriculum. ACLU filed a sex discrimination suit on behalf of SONDRA HALE, BETTY BROOKS and others. Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum filed suit to abolish all government funding to women's studies programs, on the grounds that universities have provided funds for radical programs promoting feminism and lesbianism.



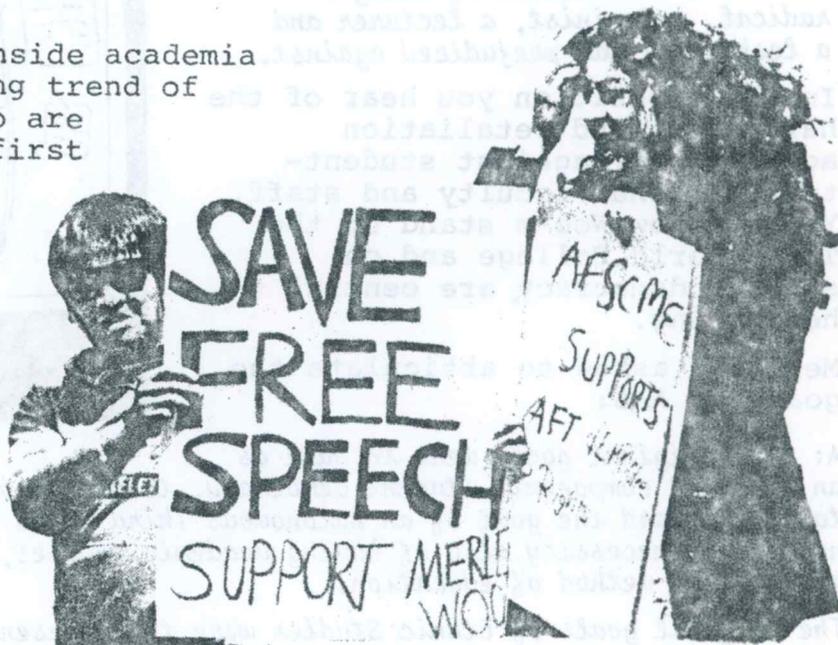
Free Speech Cases (continued)

In 1982, students, faculty and supporters at MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE in Brooklyn, waged a 100 day sit-in to protest the second class treatment of the college's 95% Black and 75% women student body. Nearly two years of struggle, led by Black women, has brought a series of brilliant victories.



The Medgar Evers Women's Center opened in 1983 and is now budgeted for a full-time director and counselors. Dr. Andre Nicola-McLaughlin will be heading the new Women's Studies and Research Program. Recently appointed President Chunn is lobbying for senior college 4 year status, an Africana Studies program and expanded child care facilities. Four of six popular and progressive faculty fired by the former President have been rehired.

All over the country, inside academia and out, we see a growing trend of conservatism. Those who are most outspoken are the first objects of attack. It is crucial to defend the women, people of color, lesbians and gays, unionists, radicals--all workers--against this kind of McCarthyism. We take strength both from the victories and the continuing battles of these cases.



Shaon Umene

State Complaint

In Merle Woo's case the legal documents were never confined to arguing the technicalities alone. They were designed, by Mary Dunlap, Woo's attorney, and the MWDC legal team, to be a concise, clear and politically strong exposure of all the issues of the case. Write for a copy of Woo's State Complaint.

For a copy of Woo's State Complaint, please send \$1.00 to MWDC, 2661 21st St., SF, CA 94110



Deposition Depot

by Edgar Poma

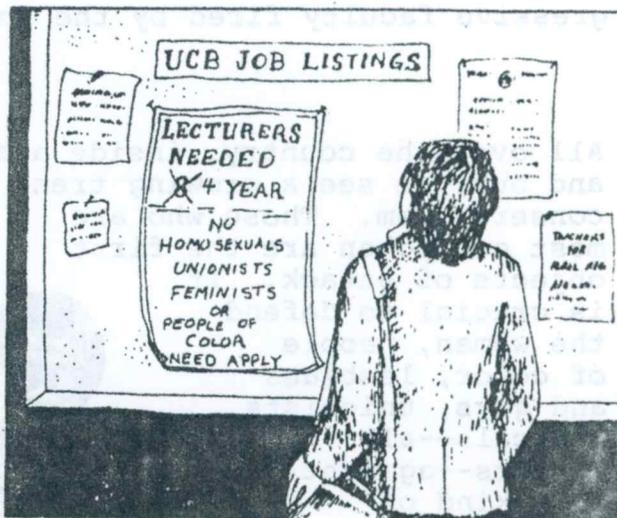
A deposition is the testimony of a witness, made under oath and recorded for use in trial. Merle Woo's deposition is 3 volumes of dramatic testimony to her firing, and to the history of Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies (AAS).

You can note a cynical, condescending emphasis in Philip Spiekerman, UC's attorney. But unlike Madame X in the tearjerker, Merle didn't collapse on the stand. She didn't hedge, always answered directly and consistently brought together the relevant issues.

Q: Do you believe you were the subject of prejudice because you were a woman?

A: ...as a combination of being a radical, a feminist, a lecturer and a lesbian, I was prejudiced against.

In the deposition you hear of the harassment and retaliation against Woo, against student-tutors, other faculty and staff. You see how Woo's stand on the Third World College and on student democracy, are central to her firing.



Ruby Slattery

Merle is asked to articulate the goals of AAS:

A: The original goals were to have as an integral component, student democracy, to offer community related courses...and to move toward the goal of an autonomous Third World College...this is not to negate the necessity also of having academic courses, but this was to be an alternative method of education...

The original goals of Ethnic Studies were to represent a group of people who are at this time 75 to 80% of the population of California...UC Berkeley ought to have an educational policy which reflects the education of the majority...in terms of who they are, their history, and by promoting certain basic skills so they can enter whatever profession they choose...

Q: What sort of student participation should have been allowed?

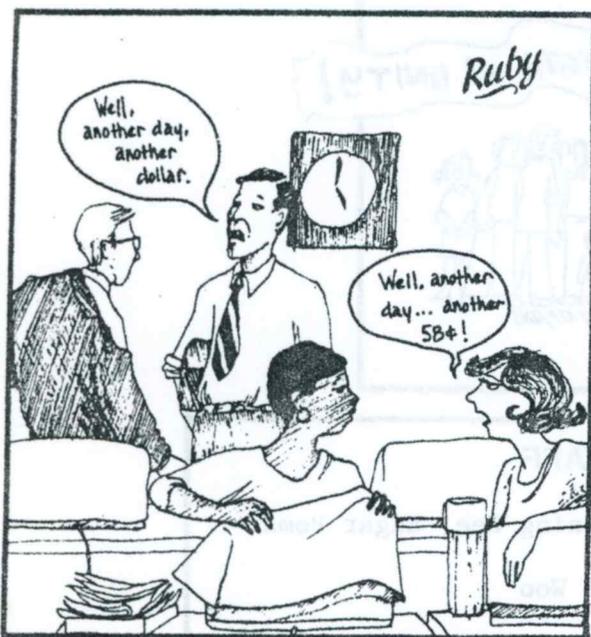
A: ...being able to express their opinions without being attacked, ridiculed, put down and criticized, which is what happened. I think students should be treated with respect and should have voting privileges.

Q: Do you contend you were denied the opportunity to further the original goals of AAS? A: Yes. Q: How...? A: I was fired.

These depositions are important historical documents. They give the context of Woo's firing--the rightward trend of AAS and the retaliation against those who criticized and protested the elimination of the original goals of AAS. The pattern of censorship at UC continues to affect others.

Spreading The News Of The Victory

- February 17: Press conference announcing the settlement at the San Francisco Federal Building Pressroom.
- March 6: Merle Woo and Karen Brodine speak at UCLA for the Asian American Coalition and UCLA Law School.
- March 8: Merle Woo speaks at International Women's Day rally, Sproul Plaza, UC Berkeley.
- March 27: Bay Area Radical Women meeting on free speech, censorship and the Woo case.
- March 31: MWDC attends and speaks at the Women and the Law Conference, Los Angeles.
- April 13-15: Merle keynote speaker at the Women's Leadership Conference, UC Berkeley.
- April 16: MWDC members speak at the International Association of Theatrical and Stage Employees, Local 16.
- April 23: Nellie Wong speaks about the case at the Asian Health Caucus, University of California, San Francisco.
- May 19: MWDC Victory Celebration, San Francisco.
- June 21-23: Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference, UC Berkeley. Merle Woo a keynote speaker.
- June 24-28: MWDC attends National Women's Studies Association Conference, Rutgers University, New Jersey.
- June 30: MWDC Victory Celebration, New York City, NY.
- July 15: National Lesbian and Gay March, San Francisco. Merle Woo speaks.



3:30 P.M. Poem

*He tells me just this moment
 he is taking one day's vacation tomorrow
 and I ask shouldn't I call
 the home office tomorrow morning
 to inform them of the change
 in the staff report
 and he says no, he doesn't want
 them thinking we don't know
 what we are doing as he has things
 to do at home and I write a note
 in shorthand in my mind
 as he tells me he turns away
 to the next office to circumvent
 his white lie coming through
 my teeth and I know it
 though I am underprivileged.*

by Nellie Wong

MWDC — ACT II

by Nancy Kato

The Merle Woo Defense Committee does not plan to dissolve after the victory.

Because reinstated workers who have won discrimination cases often are subjected to continued harassment or retaliation once they return to work, the MWDC intends to continue its support of Woo. We will be there, backing up Woo's right to free speech

at UC. As students, staff, faculty and community people, we will continue to draw the connections of Woo's case and victory to other examples of discrimination at UC. Management doesn't like a winner, but we do!

For information, write to the MWDC, 2661 21st Street, San Francisco, CA 94110. (415) 864-1278.



MWDC members and supporters cheer after press conference announcing the victory.



NEWSLETTER STAFF

- Editors:** Karen Brodine, Jennings Gee, Edgar Poma
- Paste-up:** Karen Brodine
- Proofreaders:** Jennings Gee, Merle Woo
- Mimeoing:** Manny Sunshine
- Writers:** Karen Brodine, Jennings Gee, Nancy Kato, Edgar Poma, Nellie Wong, Merle Woo