

THE COLLEGE FIX

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A former director in the Office of Equity, Social Justice and Multicultural Education at a community college in California says she was dismissed earlier this month for criticizing her department's narrow DEI philosophy and attempting to bring in more perspectives.

Tabia Lee served De Anza College in the role of faculty director since 2021.

"I'm not going quietly," Lee (*pictured*) told *The College Fix* in a March 16 phone interview. "I cannot do that and I won't do that."

"My plans truly are to continue shining a light," she said. "I am putting on a floodlight and I am telling all, because I feel like if the public knew what was happening on their tax dollars ... I feel like there will be an outrage and a demand for change."

Lee's job was terminated "after she questioned antiracist 'orthodoxy,' objected to the college's land acknowledgments for an Indigenous tribe, tried to bring a 'Jewish inclusion' event to campus, declined to join a 'socialist network,' refused to use the gender-neutral terms 'Latinx' and 'Filipinx,' inquired why the word 'Black' was capitalized but not 'white,' and allegedly disrespected a founder of the Black Lives Matter movement," according to *Inside Higher Ed*. Additionally, "I no longer participate in gender pronouns because I find that the same toxic ideologies around race ideologies are now being advanced under gender ideologies," she told the news outlet in a written statement.

At her former job, Lee was "expected to hold a particular ideology," she told *The Fix*. Even more, she had felt that there had been opposition to her "literally from the beginning," she told *The Fix*. She described "bullying and harassment" that "spanned over two years" since her first few weeks on the job.

One colleague accused her of "whitespeaking" and "whitesplaining" and "supporting white supremacy" in front of a group during a presentation, she said.

"I was deeply offended. I just didn't understand the whole thinking," she said.

When she asked the colleague not to call her a white supremacist, her peers "looked at me in a disapproving way, as if I had wronged him," she said.

This is despite having been transparent with the college since the beginning of the hiring process, according to Lee. She “did not identify as woke,” she told them.

She was also put off by messaging from De Anza saying that “being on time and being objective” are part of “white supremacy culture,” she said.

“Lee was accused, in official documents, of a ‘persistent inability to demonstrate cooperation in working with colleagues and staff,’ and an ‘Unwillingness to accept constructive criticism,’” according to a Cato Institute blog [post](#) by Erec Smith, Lee’s friend and colleague. Lee told *The Fix* she agrees with Smith’s assessment that she was fired for asking questions and holding the wrong ideas.

“I noticed that there was a lot of resistance to my even asking questions about antiracism policy efforts and language,” Lee said in a [video](#) released March 12 by the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism, a nonprofit assisting her with its legal network. “I just purely wanted to know what folks meant when they were using those terms.”

“People have literally attacked me for doing what I have always taught my students to do, which is to think critically, to respect diverse opinions and viewpoints, and to exercise their own freedom of expression and their right to speak and ask questions about diversity, equity and inclusion.”

The Fix reached out this week to FAIR for comment but has yet received a response.

Lee is a co-founder with Erec Smith of Free Black Thought, a [website](#) that “seeks to represent the rich diversity of black thought beyond the relatively narrow spectrum of views promoted by mainstream outlets as defining ‘the black perspective,’” according to its website.

Lee authored a [paper](#) for the publication’s peer-reviewed journal in February titled “Race Ideology-in-Practice.”

“In recent years neo-reconstructionist race(ist) hustlers have become dominant in educational discourse and beyond, threatening to push us backwards and further into the deeps of racial strife and division with a hyper-focus redefining racism as systematic and a promotion of equity over equality,” Lee [wrote](#).

She identified as “neo-reconstructionists” writers [Ibram Kendi](#) and [Robin DiAngelo](#) who promote a particular kind of “anti-racism” that affirms that racism is “systemic, ever present, and cannot be overcome.”

“An individual California Community College faculty member’s deviation from, questioning, or dissent about the prevailing [racial] orthodoxy opens them up to vicious slander, libel, and ostracization,” the paper continued.

“In such a climate, absolute compliance with the new authoritarian order is veritably guaranteed and opportunities for diverse viewpoints to be expressed are crushed and silenced at every turn,” according to the paper.

As De Anza's diversity director, Lee tried to push back against this new race philosophy by questioning why certain terms were used and educating others from a broader perspective on injustice.

"It really is an attempt to redefine what racism is, to redefine what discrimination is... it's all these redefinitions of words that sound familiar to everyone but when they're being used they're meaning something completely different than what the common understandings are." Lee told *The Fix*.

"When we start to redefine things and absolve certain groups of people from accountability and basic human decency because of how they're racialized or how they perceive themselves, then we can get into sticky situations like the one we're in here," she continued.

Lee has a doctorate in education from UC Davis, according to [LinkedIn](#). She has worked as an English, civics, and social studies teacher in urban American public middle schools and as a consultant with higher education faculties, according to her De Anza [bio](#).

A spokesperson for the community college district that includes De Anza College [told Inside Higher Ed](#) that officials have "an obligation to protect privacy in personnel matters."

"Without commenting on any specific matter, we can share that faculty members have comprehensive due process and appeals rights both under the law and negotiated through their bargaining unit," the email said.