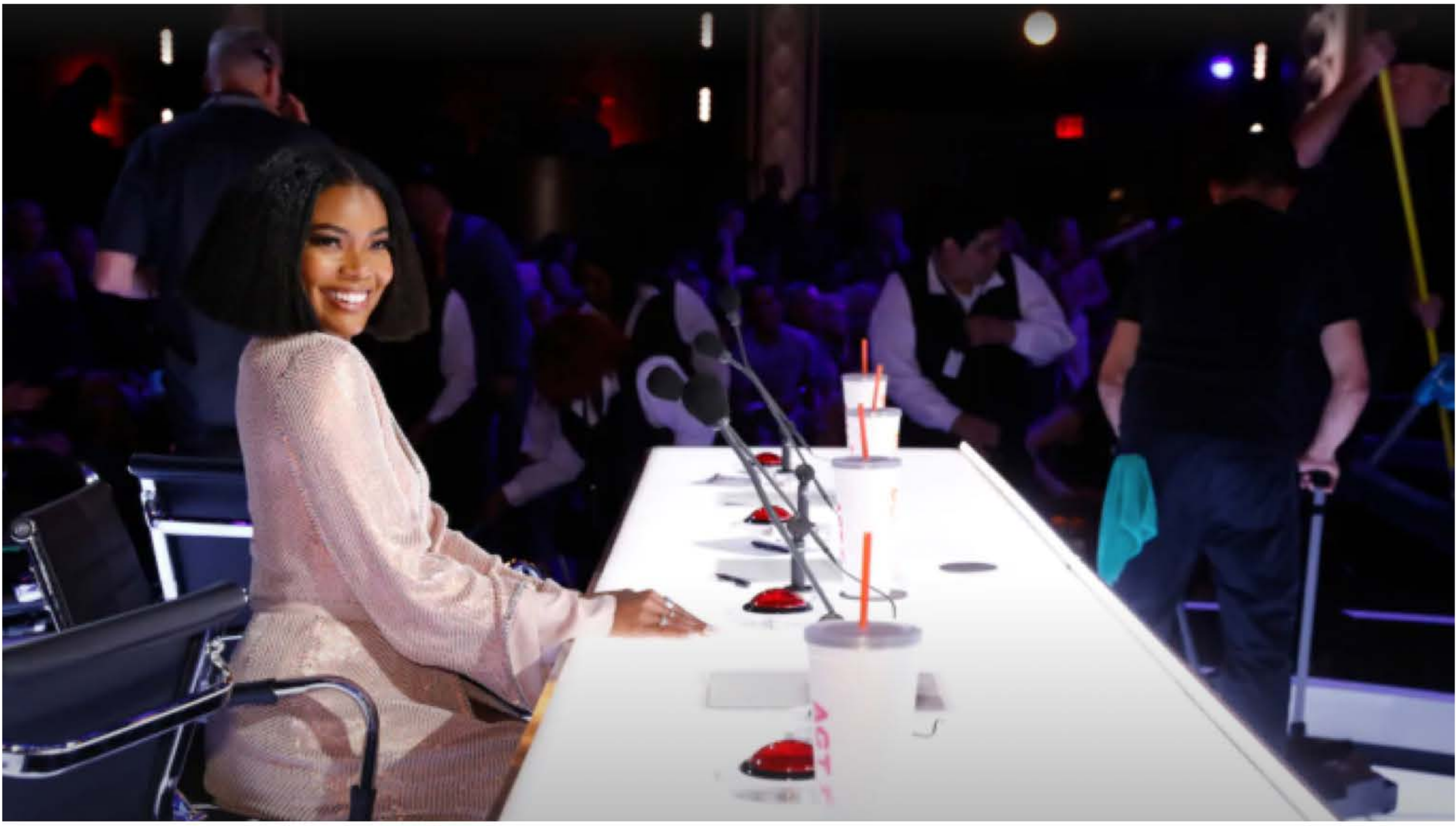


Gabrielle Union To Meet With NBC Soon On ‘America’s Got Talent’s “Toxicity”, Will Not Return As Judge



By Dominic Patten

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The L.A.'s Finest star will not be hitting the buzzer on the Simon Cowell competition series anymore, but she is aiming to make things better at AGT

NBC

EXCLUSIVE: Gabrielle Union is set to sit down with NBC this week over what really happened on *America’s Got Talent* and why she was sacked from the Simon Cowell-created show. The purpose of the meeting is to improve the culture and atmosphere on the competition series, however, and Union will not be returning to *AGT* under any foreseeable circumstances.

“Gabrielle believes there is a toxicity that has become normalized at *Talent*,” an insider told Deadline on Monday. “She wants to help fix that, because she loved a lot of her time on the show last season, even with the issues with Simon and what have you,” the source added. “But she could never go back, even if they did a [180] and asked her to for another season — no.”

Having yet to speak with NBC directly about the racial bias, discrimination and more she said she experienced on her Season 14 stint on *AGT* and the alleged retaliation that followed, the *Being Mary Jane* actor is scheduled to meet in the next few days with outside counsel recently retained by NBC. It is unclear whether anyone from the Comcast-owned network will actually be in meeting at the Beverly Hills law firm. If anyone from NBC proper is there, if will only be members of the senior in-house legal team, I’ve heard.



Supposedly caught by surprise by most of the claims surrounding the sudden exits of Union and fellow judge Julianne Hough, NBC is now determined to show that any investigation they initiate maintains strict and unbiased independence, sources close to the matter say.

Dropped from the show after just one season on November 22, Union retained muscular Hollywood attorney Bryan Freedman last week as news of her departure became public. Having represented Megyn Kelly last year in her successful and ultimately lucrative exit from NBC News, the Freedman + Taitelman LLP partner is no stranger to playing hardball if required with the network.

Freedman did not responded to requests for comment today on the Union state of affairs, and NBC representatives said they are standing by their statement of Sunday morning. The head of Time’s Up offered stinging remarks on the situation earlier Monday.

On Sunday, the network and producers (Fremantle and Cowell’s Syco) put out another statement as the fallout from Union being “fired,” as her husband and NBA star Dwyane Wade said, intensified. “We remain committed to ensuring a respectful workplace for all employees and take very seriously any questions about workplace culture,” the statement read. “We are working with Ms. Union through her representatives to hear more about her concerns, following which we will take whatever next steps may be appropriate.”

The meeting this week is intended to be those next steps.

Although Union is done being on-camera for *AGT*, she is apparently leaning towards a public inclusion effort from NBC and the show, as well as a reconfiguration of the internal communication and oversight structure.

Yet, unsurprisingly, as SAG-AFTRA starts a probe of their own, the finger-pointing is well underway, with all sides putting the blame on others for how Union’s concerns and eventual pink-slipping were handled. “Nobody asked too many questions about *AGT*, because everything seemed fine and the numbers were so good year after year,” one network source said, noting that the show was seen as “Cowell’s domain” within NBC “for the most part.”

With whispers of too many cooks in the *AGT* kitchen, NBC is now trying to gather what was said to whom by who, and which people Union talked to about matters such as her hair and wardrobe choices being “too black.” The network brass also wants to know who revealed never-aired, inappropriate jokes by guest Jay Leno and illegal inside smoking by Cowell, and what truly transpired in a May meeting between Union and Cowell at his Malibu home.

At that Cowell-requested gathering, which was first reported last week by Vulture and confirmed by Deadline, the famously acerbic Brit is said to have bluntly told Union not to take her concerns to NBC overlords but to him and he would handle.

Just on face value alone, the meeting has a certain corrosive irony as Cowell’s behavior and the tone he established on *AGT* was one of Union’s primary concerns.

But, as Shonda Rhimes and others add their voices to a chorus of NBC critics, that might be for another meeting.



shonda rhimes

@shondarhimes



I’m with @itsgabrielleu. @NBCUniversal: Discrimination, harassment & retaliation have no place on #AmericasGotTalent or any workplace. I’m joining @TIMESUPNOW in calling on NBC’s leadership to take concrete and long-term action to fix its toxic culture.times.upnow.us/2LixmZA



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