Food Network Fires Paula Deen Over Racism Scandal

Food Network star Paula Deen (shown) has been dumped by her network following a racism scandal which began with a lawsuit filed by Lisa Jackson, a Caucasian woman in her 40s, against Deen and Deen's brother, Bubba Hiers. Jackson's lawsuit alleged that Deen had been guilty of using the "n-word," sexual harassment, and infliction of emotional distress on Jackson while working at Uncle Bubba's Seafood and Oyster House in Savannah, Georgia from 2005 to 2010 as the general manager.

The lawsuit took Deen and Hiers by surprise as they'd had a good relationship with Jackson before this all began. Prior to filing the lawsuit, Jackson had written a letter to Deen, praising both her and Hiers, which stated:

> When I came to work for this company, as a person, I felt hopeless. I needed something, some opportunity that could provide me hope as an individual, as a woman, to make it on my own. At 15, homeless, without parents and with a young child, my life was headed in a direction no one could ever assume positive. As you know, I did what I had to do to survive, but it clearly was not the freedom or happiness I ever hoped for…. When I started working for Bubba, he gave me an opportunity that allowed me, over time, a freedom I have never experienced. He allowed me, for once in my life to take care of myself and for once, have faith in myself as a person and as a woman to know that I could do it on my own; y'all were my Aunt Peggy…. I have been given opportunities that I never thought possible, all because of you and Bubba.

Months later, however, Jackson left Uncle Bubba's Seafood and Oyster House without notice. Later, Deen and Hiers received a letter from Jackson's attorney asking for $1.25 million in settlement for the accusations asserted by Jackson, or else she would go public about the accusations. Deen refused, and accused Jackson of extortion. Jackson moved forward with the lawsuit.

In response, attorneys for Paula Deen Enterprises and Bubba Hiers filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit, citing the threatening letters submitted by Jackson.

"Prior to the filing of this suit, Jackson repeatedly threatened to assert scurrilous claims publicly in the press unless huge sums of money were paid to Jackson and her counsel, which demand was refused. Jackson's suit should be dismissed, for among other reasons, on equitable grounds on the basis of clean hands," the attorneys asserted.

The court rejected the motion, however, prompting Deen's attorneys to pursue a gag order, declaring "a protective order is necessary because Ms. Jackson and her counsel have made abundantly clear that they intend to engage in a path of personal and financial destruction because Paula Deen would not pay their pretrial settlement demand…. Through her cooking and television exposure, Mrs. Deen has arguably become the face of Southern cuisine and living…. For a public figure such as Mrs. Deen, even if Ms. Jackson's allegations are proven untrue, the harm resulting from the continuing mass dissemination of the allegations may never be undone."

According to Judge Louisa Abbot, who denied the gag order, "concerns about potentially adverse pretrial publicity and the potential effects of damage to their reputations do not outweigh any of the constitutional principles invoked by this motion."

The controversy has intensified after Deen told an attorney questioning her under oath last month that she has used the "n-word." "Yes, of course," she responded, adding, "It's been a very long time."

On Friday, the Food Network announced it would not be renewing Deen's contract when it expires.

"Food Network will not renew Paula Deen's contract when it expires at the end of this month," the statement said.

Meanwhile Deen has posted two videotaped apologies online wherein she begs her fans to forgive her.

"Inappropriate, hurtful language is totally, totally unacceptable," Deen said in the first 45-second video posted on YouTube. "I've made plenty of mistakes along the way but I beg you, my children, my team, my fans, my partners — I beg for your forgiveness."

Because the video had contained edits, however, Deen posted a second one, in which she speaks for two unedited minutes.

"I want people to understand that my family and I are not the kind of people that the press is wanting to say we are," Deen says in the later video. "The pain has been tremendous that I have caused to myself and to others."

The scandal has compelled a number of supporters to defend Deen.

Author Anne Rice has virtually called the entire ordeal a misguided witch hunt.

"What's happening with Paula Dean? Is it fair? I never heard of her until today, and wow, this looks like a crucifixion," Rice wrote on Friday on her Facebook page. "I may be wrong but aren't we becoming something of a lynch mob culture? Is this a good example of that?"

In response to several fans who commented on her post, she wrote "Her brother sounds like a piece of work, but her remarks were made informally and in private, and clearly not intended to hurt anyone. Now they've been elevated to billboard status where they can hurt many as the result of a law suit [sic]," Rice wrote.

Rice, who is originally from New Orleans, Louisiana, also wrote on her FB page that she believes much of the controversy to be driven by a hatred for the South.

"Why does this country still hate the American South so much? You think there isn't deep hateful racism in cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles? I can tell you, that you are wrong. It's easy to hate Southerners, isn't it?"

There is evidence of a double standard when it comes to the use of the "n-word." When Jesse Jackson used it in controversial remarks about Barack Obama in 2008, there was no scandal and certainly no widespread media reporting on the subject.

And media attention for the New Black Panthers who threatened and intimidated voters and used racially charged language at Philadelphia polling stations in both 2008 and 2012 was virtually non-existent, with the exception of Fox News.

Deen fans have also taken to the Food Network's Facebook page to voice their anger at what they view as a rushed decision.

"So good-bye Food Network," one viewer wrote. "I hope you fold like an accordion!!!"

Another added, "Your dismissal of Paula Deen reflects not on her use of a commonly used word of years ago but on your own narrow-mindedness. The repercussions for your declining viewership will be great."

John McWhorter, an associate English professor at Columbia University, wrote an opinionated piece for *Time* magazine, wherein he described what is happening to Deen as a "witch hunt."

A transcript of Deen's testimony at her deposition reveals that she faced a barrage of questions regarding her use of the "n-word," as well as her comfort in using it, even amongst her friends and family. She also had to answer questions regarding the kind of jokes she liked to tell. The entire thing appears to be arguably intrusive.

"People of Deen's generation can neither change the past nor completely escape their roots in it, anymore than the rest of us. They can apologize and mean it, as Deen seems to…. Deen is old and she's sorry. She should get her job back," McWhorter opined.

Photo of Paula Deen: AP Images

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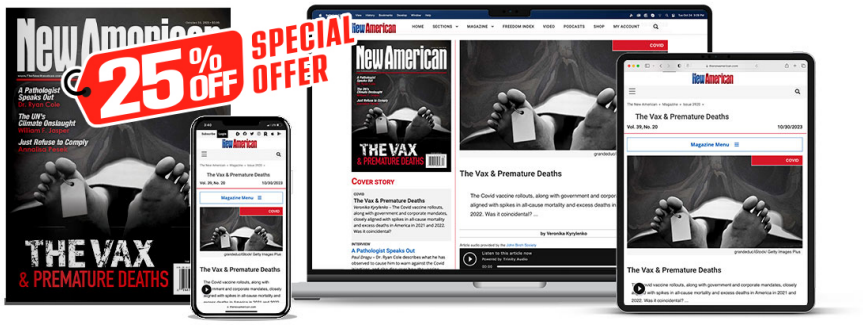

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