

AND THE WINNER ISN'T...

In December 2015, during the finale of the Miss Universe Pageant—which aired in 190 countries—first-time host Steve Harvey committed the most embarrassing gaffe in the recent history of live television. But was it really Harvey's fault?



THE GAFFE

The top three Miss Universe contestants were called to the front of the stage. After comedian and game show host Steve Harvey announced that Miss USA had come in third place, the two finalists, Colombia's Ariadna Gutiérrez and the Philippines' Pia Wurtzbach, clung to each other as they awaited the outcome. "And the winner is..." (looonnnng dramatic pause) "...Colombia!"

Harvey's first mistake was mispronouncing it "Co-lum-bia." His second mistake: The winner was actually Miss Philippines. It said so right on his card. No one on stage knew that yet, so the music started playing as Gutiérrez was given her sash and bouquet to the cheers of the crowd. Then she hugged Wurtzbach, who walked to the rear of the stage to join the 78 other contestants. Gutiérrez was crowned by the previous year's winner, Paulina Vega. She too was Colombian, making this a rare repeat win and a huge source of national pride for their country. Harvey abruptly left the stage as the celebration continued.

Roughly four minutes later, Harvey slowly walked back out and the music stopped. "Okay, folks. Uhh..." Gutiérrez was still smiling and waving a small Colombian flag. "There's...I have to apologize." Another dramatic pause—this one *not* rehearsed. Gutiérrez stopped smiling and stared at Harvey. "The first runner-up is Colombia," he said. "Miss Universe 2015 is Philippines." The crowd erupted in boos and screams as a stunned Wurtzbach was led back to the front of the stage, where Harvey said to her, "Miss Philippines, take your first walk as Miss Universe." The most painful moment came when Vega removed Gutiérrez's crown and placed it on Wurtzbach, who later said she "wasn't sure what was going on."



THE FALLOUT

Harvey's gaffe became a bigger story than the pageant itself. (The five-and-a-half-minute YouTube clip has amassed nearly 5.5 million views.) Some people—including one of the pageant's own judges, gossip maven Perez Hilton—accused organizers of staging the mistake as a publicity stunt, which they flatly denied.

The next day, a Colombian law firm threatened to sue the Miss Universe Organization to get Gutiérrez's "rightful title" back. She said in an interview, "In four minutes, they destroy your dreams, they throw it in a bag, and they throw it in



the trash.” People in her home country burned effigies of Harvey. He said his family received death threats.



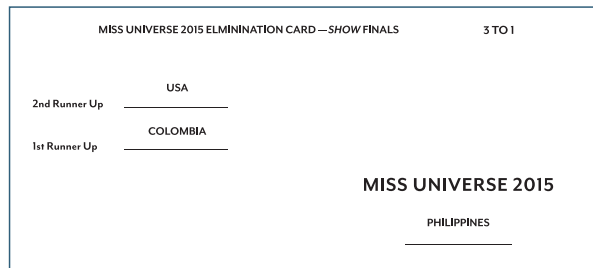
THE APOLOGY TOUR

The morning after, Harvey tweeted, “I want to apologize emphatically to Miss Philippines and Miss Columbia. This was a terribly honest human mistake, and I am so regretful.” A few minutes later (after more than 30,000 retweets), he deleted that tweet and put up a new one with both countries’ names spelled correctly. A few weeks later, Harvey invited both women on his syndicated talk show. He told Gutiérrez “just how sorry I am.” After chiding him a bit—“You need to learn to read”—she said she forgave him, even though “it was the worst night of my life, but also the best.” (Gutiérrez did okay: Two years later, she landed the coveted role of Lola, Xander Cage’s girlfriend in *XXX: Return of Xander Cage*.) Harvey repeatedly asked Wurtzbach for forgiveness as well, until she finally said, “Steve, don’t beat yourself up for this anymore. Let’s move forward. Let’s be happy.”



THE CARD

So, whose fault was it? Pageant organizers released a vague statement that read, in part, “Unfortunately, a live telecast means that human error can come into play.” But they fell short of blaming the error on any specific human. A short video taken from the crowd during the immediate aftermath appears to show Harvey telling someone, “The Teleprompter said, ‘Miss Universe—Colombia.’” But no one else saw that, and the winner’s name was only on the card. A few minutes after that clip, Harvey held it up to the TV camera and said, “This is exactly what’s on the card. I will take responsibility for this. It was my mistake.” Here’s what it looked like (“elmination” spelling mistake included):



THE BLAME GAME

After initially taking full responsibility, a month after the pageant, Harvey said on a radio show: “Now, when the mistake was made, when I said the wrong woman’s name, I can only give information I had...I said the name that was on the card. When I walked off, everything was cool.” Not long after, he said on the *Today Show*: “I was ashamed for the mistake, but I was also a little bit angry at the mistake. A lot of people could have stepped up and said, ‘I played a role in this, too, you know.’”



First publication to report on the Wright brothers’ first airplane flight in September 1904: the January 1905 edition of *Gleanings in Bee Culture*.

No one else did. Then he admitted, “Had I taken a moment to look at the card, but I was trying to keep it down so nobody saw the winner. I blew it.”

A year later, Harvey went on *The Tonight Show* and told Jimmy Fallon that he was just doing what the director had instructed: “I read the teleprompter” (which had on it “Miss Universe 2015 is”) “but the guy in my ear said, ‘Read the next name now, now.’ I said, ‘Miss Colombia.’ Crowd goes crazy. He goes, ‘Great job, Steve.’” Backstage, it was “four minutes of pure hell” before taking “the most gut-wrenching walk I’ve ever had in my life.”

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THE THUMB

Four years after the debacle, in January 2019, Harvey gave a much more detailed account on Dr. Phil’s podcast. There’d been a last-minute change. Originally, only two finalists were supposed to be brought out front, and only two names were supposed to be on the card. “We rehearsed it that way, I can’t tell you how many times.” But then: “The lady that used to run the old pageant, she decides we’re not doing that. So, she puts a third name on the card, don’t tell nobody. Little do I know, on this card, this woman done put the winner in the corner.”

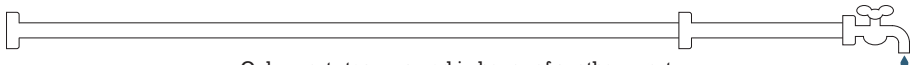
Then came the real villain: “My thumb is on the name of the winner. I never saw the third name because we never looked for it.” A still image confirms that Harvey was holding the card in his right hand, with his thumb covering the winning country. Result: When he held up the card, he only saw two countries. (Of course, that still doesn’t explain how the host of the world’s biggest beauty pageant didn’t know that “1st Runner Up” means second place.)

During those “four minutes of hell” backstage—during which Harvey reportedly unleashed a barrage of profanities—the producers told him they were going to wait until the next day to announce the error and crown Miss Philippines, but Harvey insisted that it be done immediately. “I went out there, man, and I took all that heat... It was so nasty, man. It got ugly.” In addition to the death threats, Harvey said he was treated like a punching bag by the press, and that he’s become a punchline for talk show hosts.



THE GAFFE, PT. 2

Despite the controversy (or perhaps because of it), Harvey was asked to host Miss Universe again. The next year, he asked Miss Colombia, Andrea Tovar, what the citizens of her country thought of him. Her reply: “A lot of people hate you.” (Awkward silence.) “But you know I love you!” (Laughter.)



Only sports team named in honor of another sport:
The NBA’s Indiana Pacers, named for the Indy 500 pace car.

Harvey brought up the gaffe at every subsequent pageant (he's still the host), and in 2019, when an eerily similar gaffe occurred, he made it clear who he blamed for what happened back in 2015. The gaffe happened during the National Costume Show, a previously held portion of the pageant wherein each contestant modeled an elaborate costume representing her country. The lone contestant on stage was Miss Malaysia, Shweta Sekhon, who was wearing an ornate wedding gown and standing in front of three tables of sweets and treats. Harvey walked up to Miss Malaysia and said, "Here's a look at the winner, Miss Philippines." Meanwhile, Miss Philippines, Gazini Ganados (the actual winner of the costume segment), was still backstage. But her photo was being displayed on the giant screen behind Harvey, who was gushing about Sekhon's ensemble: "This is it, right here. I thought I had on something fly [he was wearing a shiny, golden blazer] but, girl, you just, woo! Cakes and oranges and potato chips! That's a lot. And..." Sekhon stopped smiling and pulled Harvey's microphone—arm and all—over to her and said tersely, "It's not Philippines, it's Malaysia!" Then she resumed smiling.

Harvey yanked the microphone back and said, "Okay, well, let me explain something to you," he pointed forward, "I just read that in the teleprompter." Then he glared offstage, "Y'all got to quit doing this to me. I can read!" Then, to the audience: "See, this what they did to me back in 2015. Played me short like that!" Producers later blamed Sekhon for interrupting Harvey before he was able to announce the actual winner, but they didn't inform her beforehand (and she didn't find out she hadn't won the costume contest until four hours later on Twitter). That wasn't even the biggest story to come out of that year's pageant: Afterward, Harvey was widely criticized for making "tasteless" Colombian drug cartel jokes—to Miss Colombia—in reference to the death threats he'd received four years earlier. No, Steve Harvey was far from over it.

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PREHISTORIC HINDSIGHT

In 2021, a British paleobiologist named Jakob Vinther announced the discovery of the first well-preserved dinosaur butthole. Technically called a cloacal vent, the butthole belonged to a dog-sized Triceratops-like dinosaur called a Psittacosaurus. Bonus: There's a fossilized dinosaur poop still inside it! Vinther and his fellow researchers at the University of Bristol are studying the rare 100-million-year-old soft-tissue fossil to help determine whether birds did indeed evolve from dinosaurs—but this specimen is neither avian nor crocodilian. "It's its own cloaca," says Vinther, "shaped in its perfect, unique way."



erotomania is a psychological disorder where the patient thinks a famous person is in love with them and sending them coded love messages.