

CHANTILLY MODEL UNITED  
NATIONS PRESENTS

# Coachella

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## **Committee Background**

Coachella, officially referred to as the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, is the annual spring arts and music festival held in Indio, California. Founded in 1999, the festival features a myriad of musical artists specializing in genres including rock, indie music, and hip hop. Beyond performances, Coachella stands as a broader cultural phenomenon. It attracts attendees from across the world, shaping fashion trends. It's a blend of music, art, and social experience that has positioned Coachella as a major fixture in contemporary pop culture, contributing to ongoing discussion about art, community, and modern festival culture.

By 2016, the festival had evolved into a fusion of fashion and music, creating a catalyst for upcoming controversies. Critics signaled instances of cultural appropriation where festivalgoers ignorantly accessorized in culturally sensitive clothing. One particular discussion arose involving the “Boho chic aesthetic” and its impact on indigenous communities. The outbreak resulted in hashtags such as #CoachellaAppropriation flooding social media platforms; this marks the start of our committee. Furthermore, not only did attendees influence the gray areas surrounding Coachella, but the festival leadership and event sponsors also had an impact. Due to Coachella's affiliation with discriminatory organizations and funds targeted at the wrong causes, the festival faces even more aversion.



## Topic A: Cultural Appreciation vs Appropriation at Coachella

Every spring, when the desert sun casts down over the Coachella Valley, attendees enter the festival dressed head to toe in their boldest, most compelling outfits. Feathers, fringe, jewels, henna, bindis, kaftans, and headwraps present a display of creativity and color. Yet, the aesthetic drips with a deep tension that blurs the line between self-expression and cultural appropriation. Annually, hundreds of celebrities face backlash due to their outfits. The “Coachella Queen,” Vanessa Hudgens herself, has been called out numerous times for pairing a bindi, which is a decorative mark worn traditionally by Hindu women, with ponchos and maxi dresses. Similarly, Kendall Jenner has previously inappropriately worn an Indian “nath,” Indian bridal jewelry, with Western attire.

However, trends such as this cannot be pinned on a few celebrities, as cultural appropriation has become an event-wide phenomenon. In recent years, Coachella has faced a flood of backlash over the casual usage of culturally significant attire. Namely, Native American warbonnets were worn by festival attendees, becoming a highlighted point of criticism. Sacred headwear, such as kaffiyehs and hijabs, is worn carelessly with no cultural significance, although it is meant to be respected and revered within its respective community. In recent years, South Asian textiles, like lehengas or saree-inspired ensembles, were spotted amongst celebrities, mislabeled as “Scandinavian scarves and bohemian tops,” essentially erasing their cultural origin. As noted by the Hamline University oracle, this is simply called “whitewashing,” not appreciation. Trends such as these commodify centuries of rich tradition and culture and transform sacred items into “creative” festival costumes. This misappropriation is further extended through the rise of pop-up tattoos, or temporary henna art, traditional practices that date back thousands of years in South Asia and the Middle East. These designs are typically worn during cultural occasions like weddings and religious holidays. Henna is associated with cultural significance, which cannot be translated to a



Coachella vendor booth. While attendees and celebrities argue that it is cultural appreciation, critics note that true appreciation requires education, respect, and acknowledgment. Raising questions about how to keep Coachella a creative and expressive festival without upsetting communities.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What role should social media play in Coachella's cultural sensitivity efforts?
2. Should Coachella create guidelines for what attendees should and can wear?
3. How can Coachella maintain its reputation for creativity and appreciation without promoting cultural sensitivity?

### **Helpful Links:**

1. [What is the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation?](#)
2. [Cultural Appropriation at Coachella](#)
3. [Coachella is back. But have festivals escaped the problematic legacy of 'boho chic'?](#)



## Topic B: Ethical Sponsorship and Inclusivity in the Music Industry

Ethical Sponsorship and Inclusivity in the Music Industry Events such as Coachella rely on corporate sponsors. In past years, the event's connection to the AEG founder Philip Anschutz has increased its criticism. Coachella's parent company was exposed for having donated to anti-LGBTQ, anti-environmental, and conservative organizations. This association marked the beginning of a new social media outbreak of #BoycottCoachella, with activists preaching that attending Coachella would be an indirect support of such causes.

The 2016 Coachella lineup also sparked debates about inclusivity due to the vast margin of underrepresented minority artists and women, as only 16% of the performers were women; an even smaller percentage of the musicians were of minority races. In addition, individuals have observed that Coachella predominantly prioritized male or white acts over others, showing the systematic inequalities within the music festival. Even behind the scenes, leadership among the festival mirrors these disparities. Only a few organizers or decision-makers come from diverse backgrounds, showing how partnerships fail to reflect the audiences that they represent. Critics argue that inclusivity is more than just a showcase; it is imperative to demand structural changes in how festivals should be organized and distributed.



Additionally, large festivals like Coachella leave behind a massive carbon footprint and giant environmental impacts. In 2016 alone, the festival left behind approximately 107 tons of waste daily, the majority of it resulting from single-use plastics, fast fashion, and carbon emissions that are linked to travel and energy use. Although there have been few efforts made to promote sustainability, the public believes that there should be stricter environmental policies. The waste emitted by the festival is not insurmountable. Emerging festivals worldwide are experimenting with models to promote environmental sustainability and sponsorships. Artists like Billie Eilish and Coldplay continue to refuse partnerships with discriminatory organizations and demand greener touring practices. These

examples suggest the way forward, but the question becomes, how can Coachella, one of the largest platforms, transform?

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Should Coachella refuse sponsorships from corporations with unethical practices, even if it risks financial loss?
2. What specific environmental policies can Coachella implement to reduce its waste and carbon footprint?
3. How can a festival of Coachella's size realistically balance profitability with inclusivity and sustainability?
4. Is it the responsibility of artists to demand ethical practices from festivals and sponsors?

### **Helpful Links:**

1. [AEG Founder Who Funded Anti-LGBT Agendas Is Now Fighting Legal Pot](#)
2. [Coachella Sustainability](#)
3. [Coachella owner's anti-LGBTQIA+ history](#)



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