

Nathan Maldonado

Common Application: Personal Statement

PROMPT:

Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story. (650)

RESPONSE:

I have always hated Starbucks. The smell, the taste, the texture—just everything about a Caramel Macchiato has seemed wrong. I will be reminded, however, during attendance and first-day introductions that I cannot escape this American essential, even within my last name. "Nathan Ma—Macchiato?" "Oh, it's Maldonado. Here!"

In Southern California, I had lived within the predominantly Hispanic communities of Palmdale and Boyle Heights in Los Angeles County. Café de olla (traditional Mexican coffee) being crucial in my culture meant I would often drink it as I spent my net worth of ten dollars on my twelfth game of Lotería (Mexican bingo). I do not avoid all coffee; instead, I avert myself from Starbucks for what it represents: assimilation.

Mexican coffee has been a staple of every major and minor event in my life. I could count on café de olla after the sun fell during Saturday nights after quinceañeras and before the sun rose during Sunday mornings before church.

The morning of my 3D design and modeling competition for NASA at Fresno State, I had Mexican coffee to wish me good fortune on my toolbox design for the International Space Station. Unlike the other parents, my father had to work, leaving the travel mug in my backpack to act as my interim support system that encouraged me to speak with the judges about my method, process, and device, leading me to a victory.

Starbucks, however, meant the acceptance of a culture that did not want me. Upon moving to Central California from Los Angeles County, the responses I received to celebrating my culture shifted. I had always been surrounded by voices like mine, experiences like mine, and families like mine. At Clovis North, I found that relating to my peers who carried with them a Starbucks beverage every morning meant differences that separated us beyond our drink of choice.

While I attempt to combat assimilation, my valiant efforts can only make so much of an impact. For instance, I wore a guayabera (traditional Hispanic dress-shirt) for my senior photo but was told that I did not comply with the school or district dress codes. I fought, but their decision was clear. I had two options: dress in a typical button-up or get removed from the yearbook. I dressed in a cornflower blue dress shirt and cerulean tie and chose to drink the Starbucks. I chose to assimilate despite knowing they did not want me there to begin with. Why would they, and why did I try? I was tired of losing the fight, but I realize now that exhaustion is the key to neglecting and disregarding identity.

Despite having once celebrated the mundane and the extraordinary with my Spanish-speaking relatives and friends, I had lost that outlet. Instead of playing Lotería and hiding a card that I

knew everyone needed to win, my Lotería set rests under my bed, waiting for a community to gather.

Our differences carried past the kind of coffee we drank and well into the opportunities given to us. Being low-income meant that while my peers at Clovis North had inherited their fate, I had to create mine. Intrinsically, I relied on my family for support and assurance that I am just as capable, deserving, and qualified as my peers. My appreciation for Mexican coffee reflects my gratitude for my cultural and familial communities that have molded my identity. My family provides me with a history I must honor in all ventures, originating from our unique culture of intensity, confidence, and purpose. Assimilation challenges my culture's values, and I aim to honor my heritage through my language, customs, and, most importantly, family.

So no, it's not Macchiato. It's *Maldonado*.

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