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Analytical Essay 1 – Our Kind of Ridiculous

In his essay, *Our Kind of Ridiculous*, Kiese Laymon details his experience as it alludes to racism and race relations. In this context, Laymon's image and complexion as a black man was incriminating evidence during a routine traffic stop, which he grappled with as he wrote: "Blackness is not probably cause". One could derive much contemporary application from this essay as it pertains to the shared experience of black people, but I've found it fit to analyze how race-based notions of innocence have informed Laymon's perception of his own experience and actions, as well as how grammatical choices and diction work to highlight specific sections of text.

In the text, Laymon speaks to his encounter with a "white child", the neighbor's son, when he found the kid trespassing and smudging magnets on the refrigerator. Following, Laymon mentions laughing in the boy's face after he admits to being illiterate. Cognizant of the boy's actions, Laymon perceives laughing in the boy's face as deep, terrible, and evil, despite the child's wrongdoings and disrespect for space and property. It is this grim perception of something minuscule, and Laymon's lack of justification for his action that I choose to examine. I draw from the essay, *Stranger in the Village*, where James Baldwin states, "and the strain of denying the overwhelming deniable forced Americans into rationalizations so fantastic that they approached the pathological." Although Laymon was justified in laughing at the boy, he condemned his actions because his perception of the situation was informed by race. In congruence with the quote from Baldwin, Laymon makes an equally fantastic rationalization to find himself in the wrong, and not the white child. It is presumable to say that a black boy would place himself in grave danger emulating the actions of this white child, so we cannot distribute innocence to the boy based on his age. Therefore, it is the white kid's complexion that affords him the protection to do whatever he wants, while Kiese's complexion affords him a lack of innocence, regardless of who is right and wrong.

Furthermore, I believe the grammatical structure and diction Kiese employs in addressing his hysterical outburst at the child's inability to read is intentional. Laymon describes his actions as: "Deep. Terrible. Evil. Sad laughs." Utilizing periods instead of commas draws attention to detail and asks readers to repeatedly stop, emphasizing the significance of word choice and thematic development. In the same breath, he appoints this section its own paragraph, effectively isolating the text. As a writer, Laymon's deliberate choice of diction and paragraph structure highlights the importance of this section, which leads me to engage with his use of adjectives. I propose that Laymon describes his laughs as "Sad laughs" because he finds his lack of innocence and inclination to assume responsibility saddening. Laymon follows this section with "And he laughed back, thinking I was laughing with him." I find a comparative application from another James Baldwin quote that reads: "It is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent". For Laymon to remark that the child "thought he was laughing with him", assumes the boy operates innocently. That the child doesn't understand the nature of his actions. Although this boy is the author of devastation, his white skin, once again, affords him innocence in the eyes of Kiese Laymon.