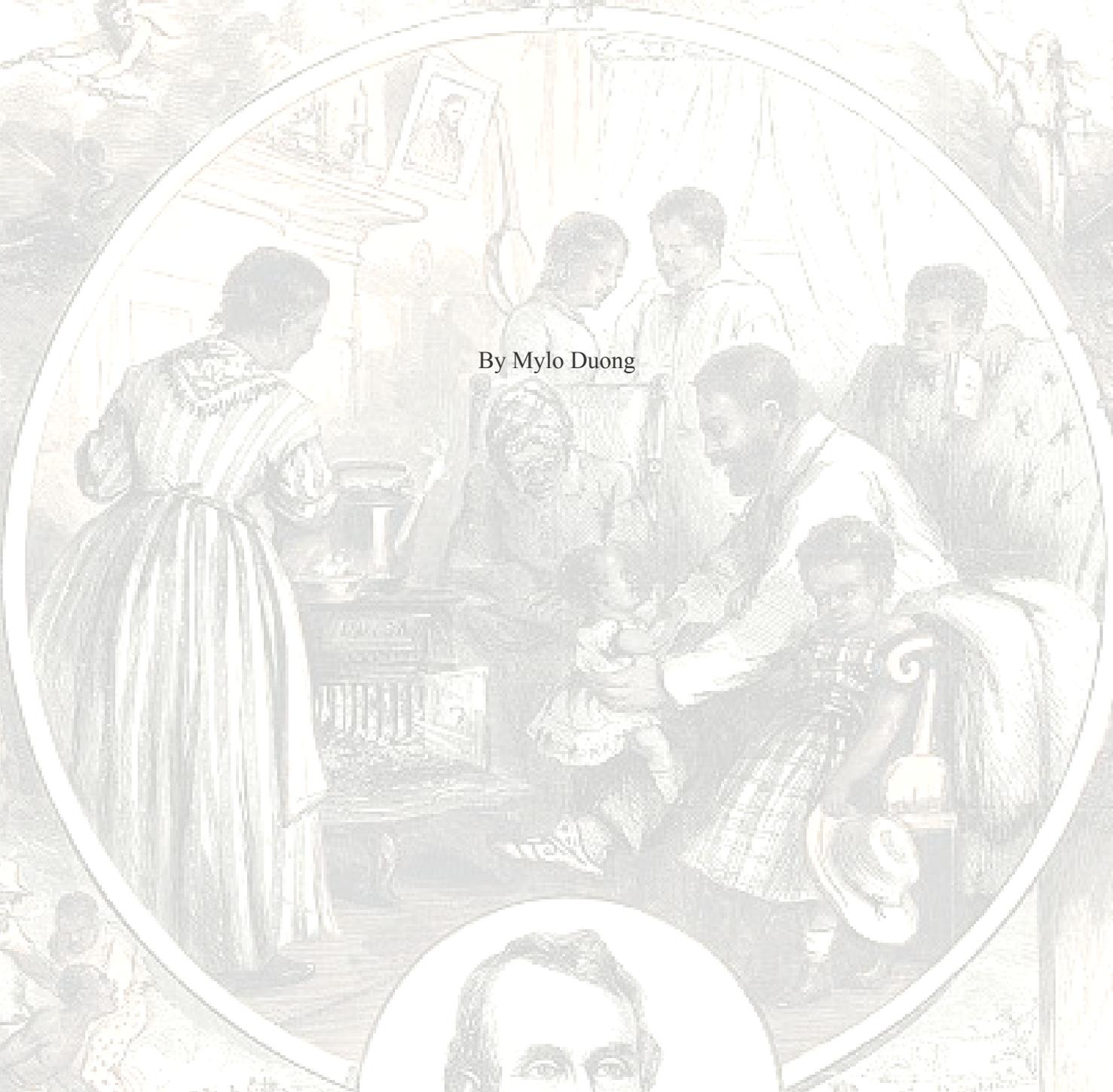


MOBY DICK: BEYOND THE WHITENESS

By Mylo Duong



Who

Are

We

Who are we to decide what to do?

and what to not do?

*When they are the ones
who decides everything just based on the color of our skin*

Who are we to decide what to do?

and what not to do

*When they believe
they are superior than us*

*Who are we...to decide what to do,
and what not to do*

When they create laws

that were held against us

Who are we?

Who are we?

We are the minorities

We are inferior, to them

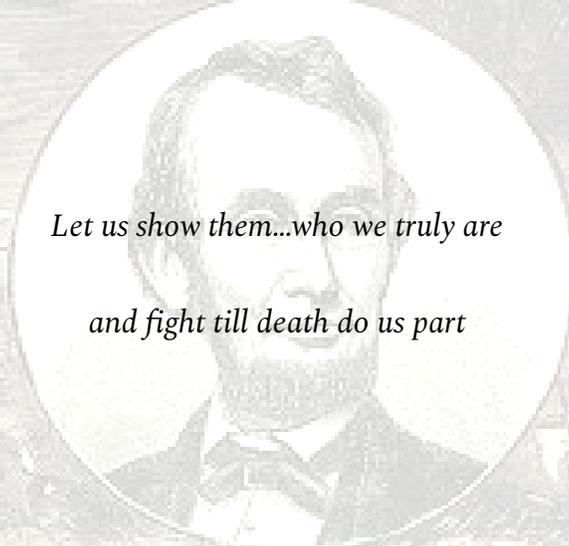
But not to us

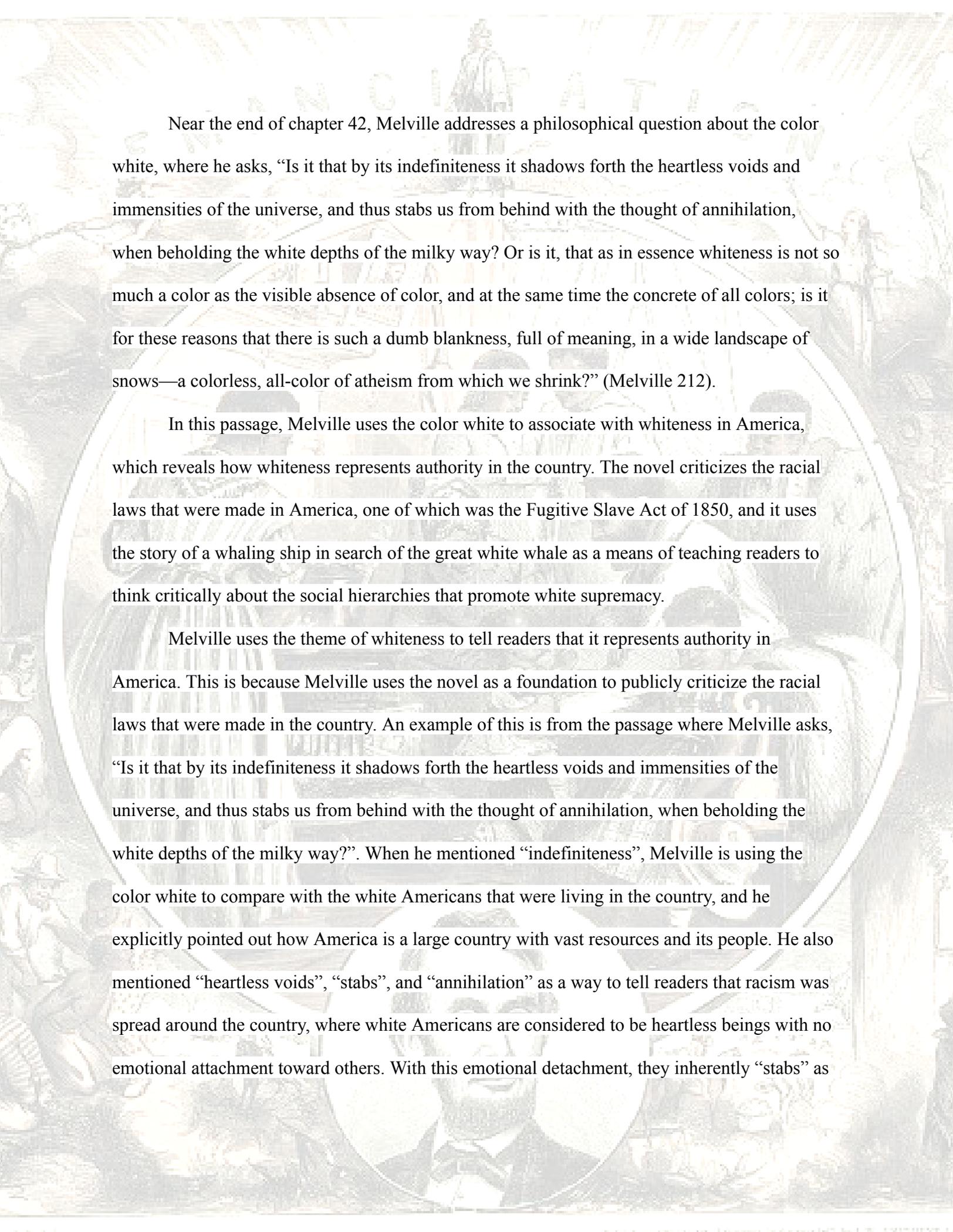
So rise up

ladies and gentlemen

Let us show them...who we truly are

and fight till death do us part

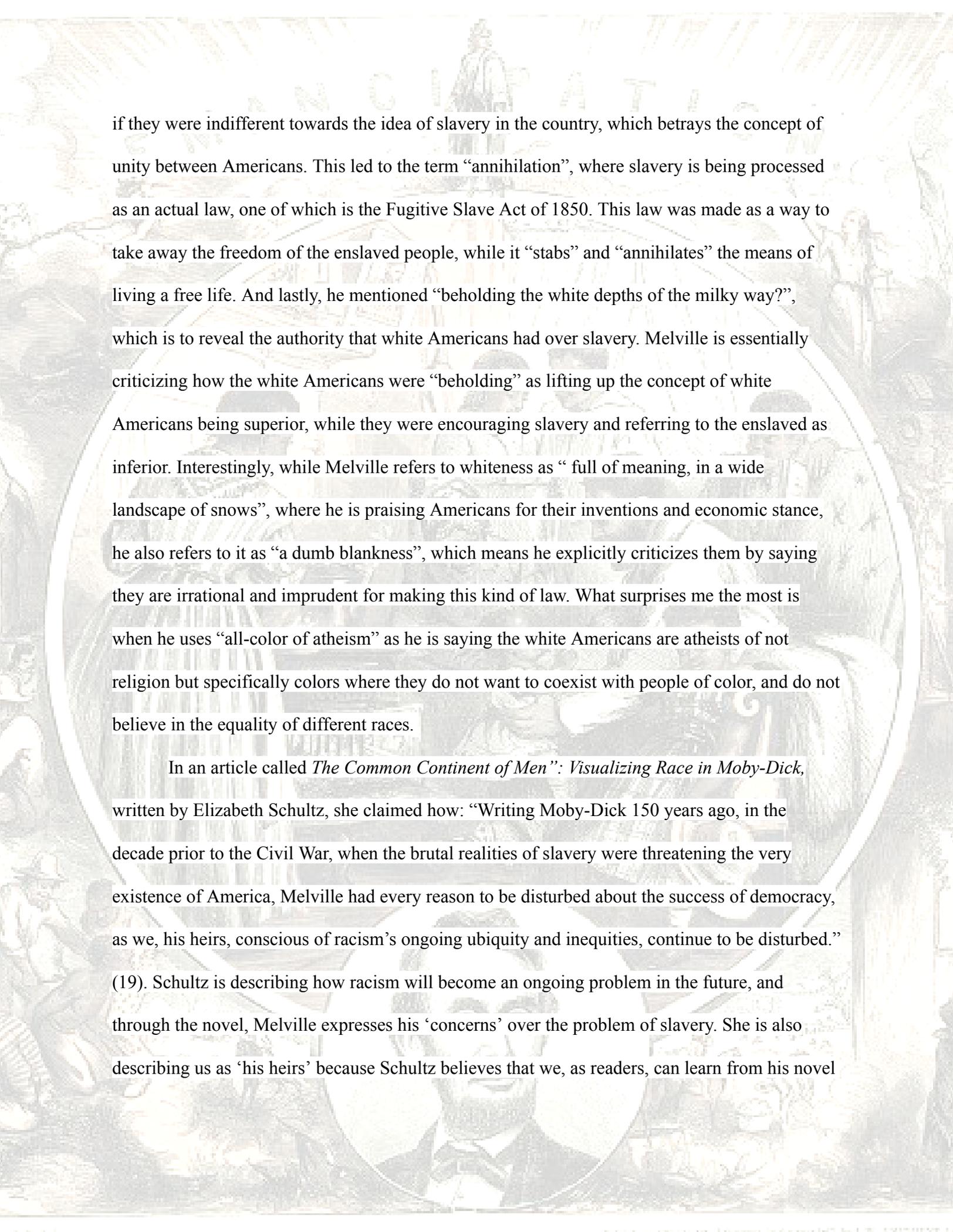




Near the end of chapter 42, Melville addresses a philosophical question about the color white, where he asks, “Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?” (Melville 212).

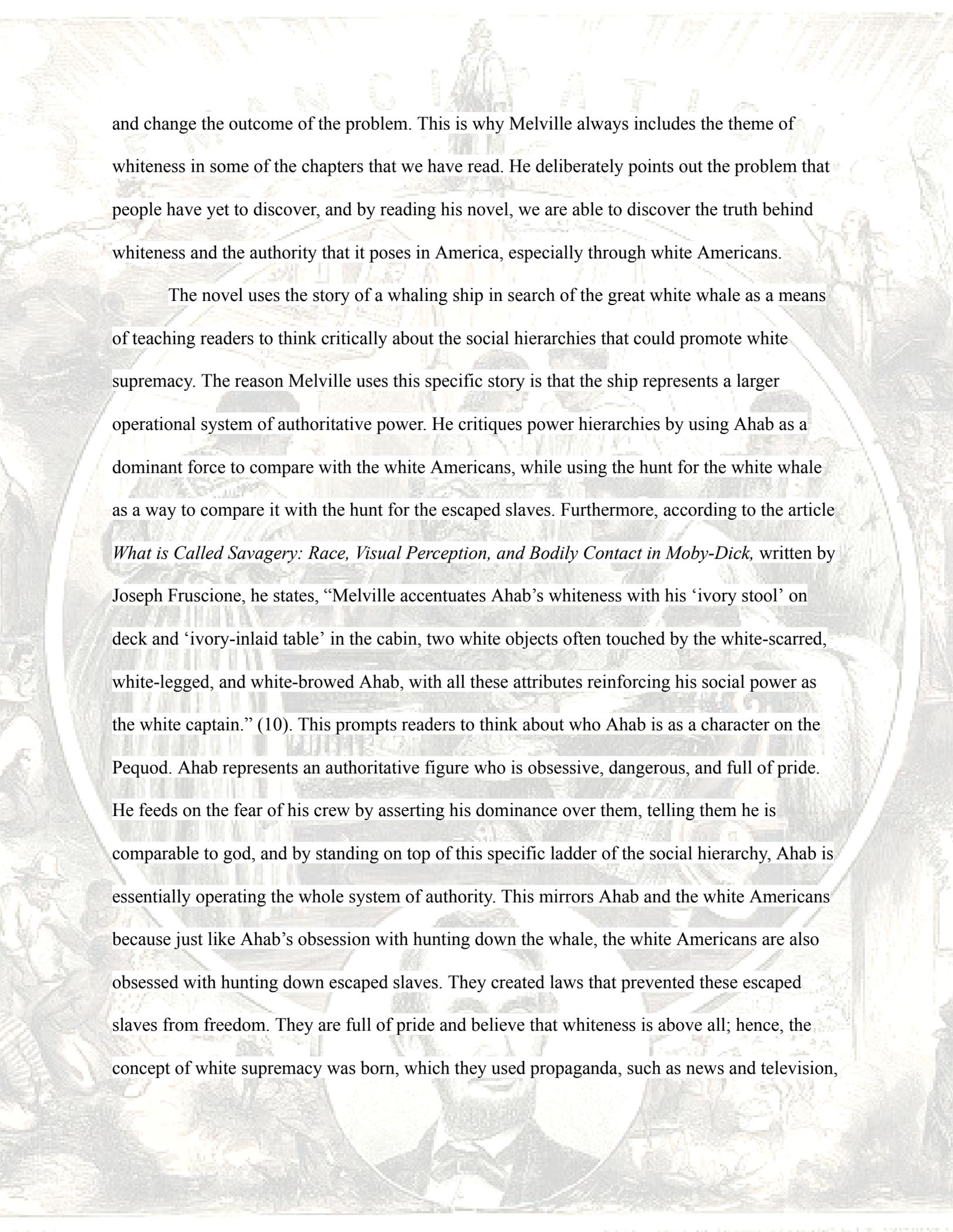
In this passage, Melville uses the color white to associate with whiteness in America, which reveals how whiteness represents authority in the country. The novel criticizes the racial laws that were made in America, one of which was the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and it uses the story of a whaling ship in search of the great white whale as a means of teaching readers to think critically about the social hierarchies that promote white supremacy.

Melville uses the theme of whiteness to tell readers that it represents authority in America. This is because Melville uses the novel as a foundation to publicly criticize the racial laws that were made in the country. An example of this is from the passage where Melville asks, “Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way?”. When he mentioned “indefiniteness”, Melville is using the color white to compare with the white Americans that were living in the country, and he explicitly pointed out how America is a large country with vast resources and its people. He also mentioned “heartless voids”, “stabs”, and “annihilation” as a way to tell readers that racism was spread around the country, where white Americans are considered to be heartless beings with no emotional attachment toward others. With this emotional detachment, they inherently “stabs” as



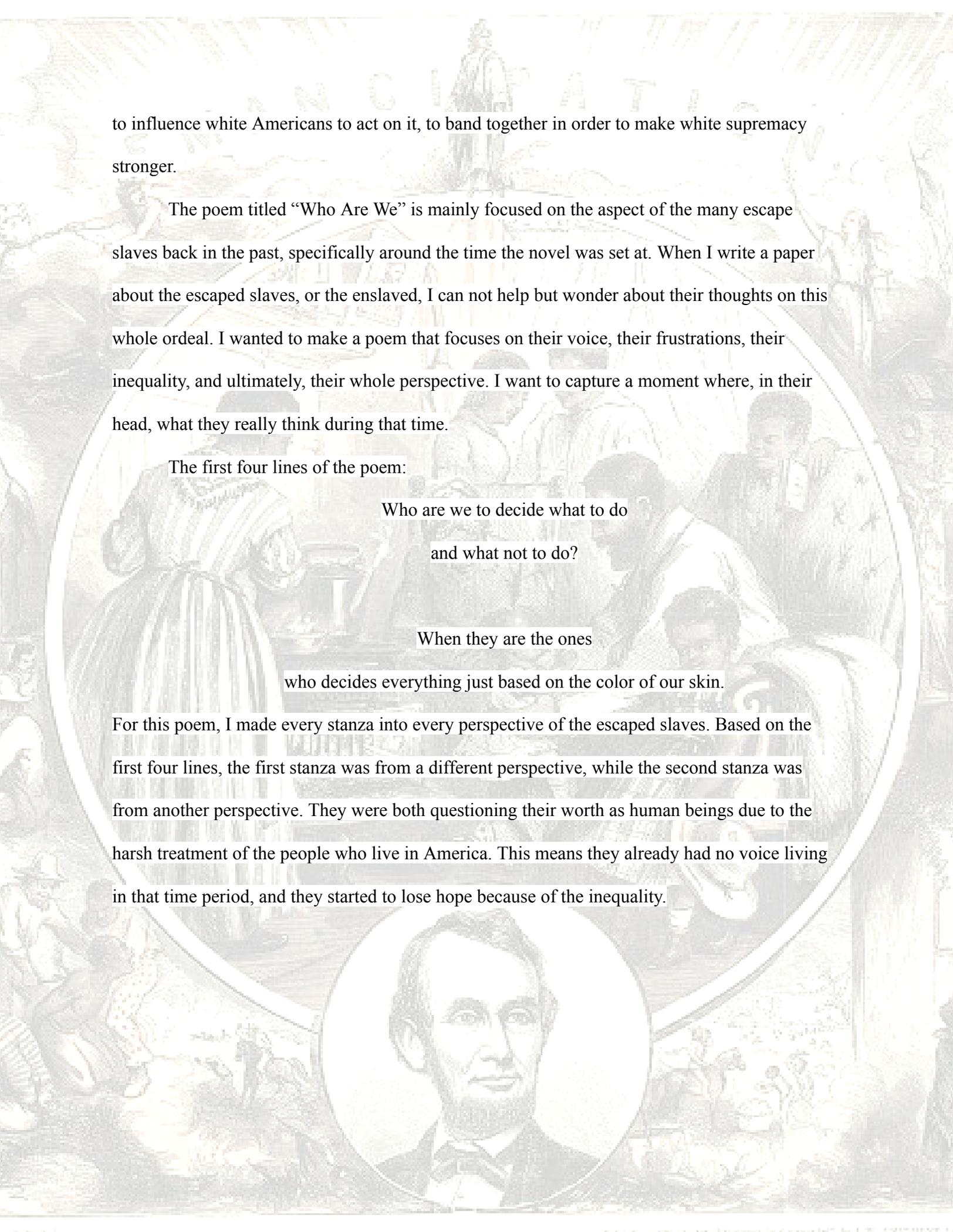
if they were indifferent towards the idea of slavery in the country, which betrays the concept of unity between Americans. This led to the term “annihilation”, where slavery is being processed as an actual law, one of which is the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. This law was made as a way to take away the freedom of the enslaved people, while it “stabs” and “annihilates” the means of living a free life. And lastly, he mentioned “beholding the white depths of the milky way?”, which is to reveal the authority that white Americans had over slavery. Melville is essentially criticizing how the white Americans were “beholding” as lifting up the concept of white Americans being superior, while they were encouraging slavery and referring to the enslaved as inferior. Interestingly, while Melville refers to whiteness as “ full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows”, where he is praising Americans for their inventions and economic stance, he also refers to it as “a dumb blankness”, which means he explicitly criticizes them by saying they are irrational and imprudent for making this kind of law. What surprises me the most is when he uses “all-color of atheism” as he is saying the white Americans are atheists of not religion but specifically colors where they do not want to coexist with people of color, and do not believe in the equality of different races.

In an article called *The Common Continent of Men”: Visualizing Race in Moby-Dick*, written by Elizabeth Schultz, she claimed how: “Writing Moby-Dick 150 years ago, in the decade prior to the Civil War, when the brutal realities of slavery were threatening the very existence of America, Melville had every reason to be disturbed about the success of democracy, as we, his heirs, conscious of racism’s ongoing ubiquity and inequities, continue to be disturbed.” (19). Schultz is describing how racism will become an ongoing problem in the future, and through the novel, Melville expresses his ‘concerns’ over the problem of slavery. She is also describing us as ‘his heirs’ because Schultz believes that we, as readers, can learn from his novel



and change the outcome of the problem. This is why Melville always includes the theme of whiteness in some of the chapters that we have read. He deliberately points out the problem that people have yet to discover, and by reading his novel, we are able to discover the truth behind whiteness and the authority that it poses in America, especially through white Americans.

The novel uses the story of a whaling ship in search of the great white whale as a means of teaching readers to think critically about the social hierarchies that could promote white supremacy. The reason Melville uses this specific story is that the ship represents a larger operational system of authoritative power. He critiques power hierarchies by using Ahab as a dominant force to compare with the white Americans, while using the hunt for the white whale as a way to compare it with the hunt for the escaped slaves. Furthermore, according to the article *What is Called Savagery: Race, Visual Perception, and Bodily Contact in Moby-Dick*, written by Joseph Fruscione, he states, “Melville accentuates Ahab’s whiteness with his ‘ivory stool’ on deck and ‘ivory-inlaid table’ in the cabin, two white objects often touched by the white-scarred, white-legged, and white-browed Ahab, with all these attributes reinforcing his social power as the white captain.” (10). This prompts readers to think about who Ahab is as a character on the Pequod. Ahab represents an authoritative figure who is obsessive, dangerous, and full of pride. He feeds on the fear of his crew by asserting his dominance over them, telling them he is comparable to god, and by standing on top of this specific ladder of the social hierarchy, Ahab is essentially operating the whole system of authority. This mirrors Ahab and the white Americans because just like Ahab’s obsession with hunting down the whale, the white Americans are also obsessed with hunting down escaped slaves. They created laws that prevented these escaped slaves from freedom. They are full of pride and believe that whiteness is above all; hence, the concept of white supremacy was born, which they used propaganda, such as news and television,



to influence white Americans to act on it, to band together in order to make white supremacy stronger.

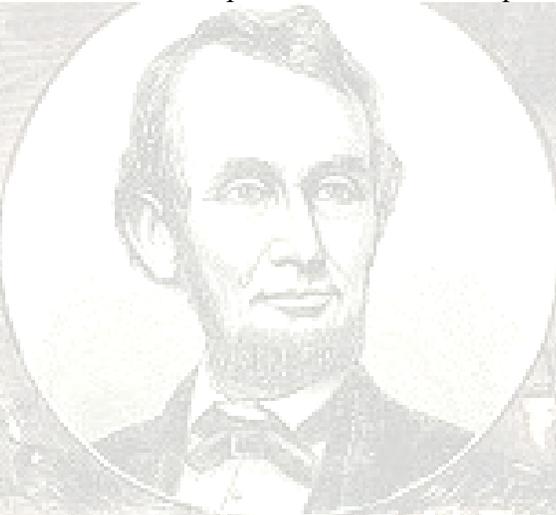
The poem titled “Who Are We” is mainly focused on the aspect of the many escape slaves back in the past, specifically around the time the novel was set at. When I write a paper about the escaped slaves, or the enslaved, I can not help but wonder about their thoughts on this whole ordeal. I wanted to make a poem that focuses on their voice, their frustrations, their inequality, and ultimately, their whole perspective. I want to capture a moment where, in their head, what they really think during that time.

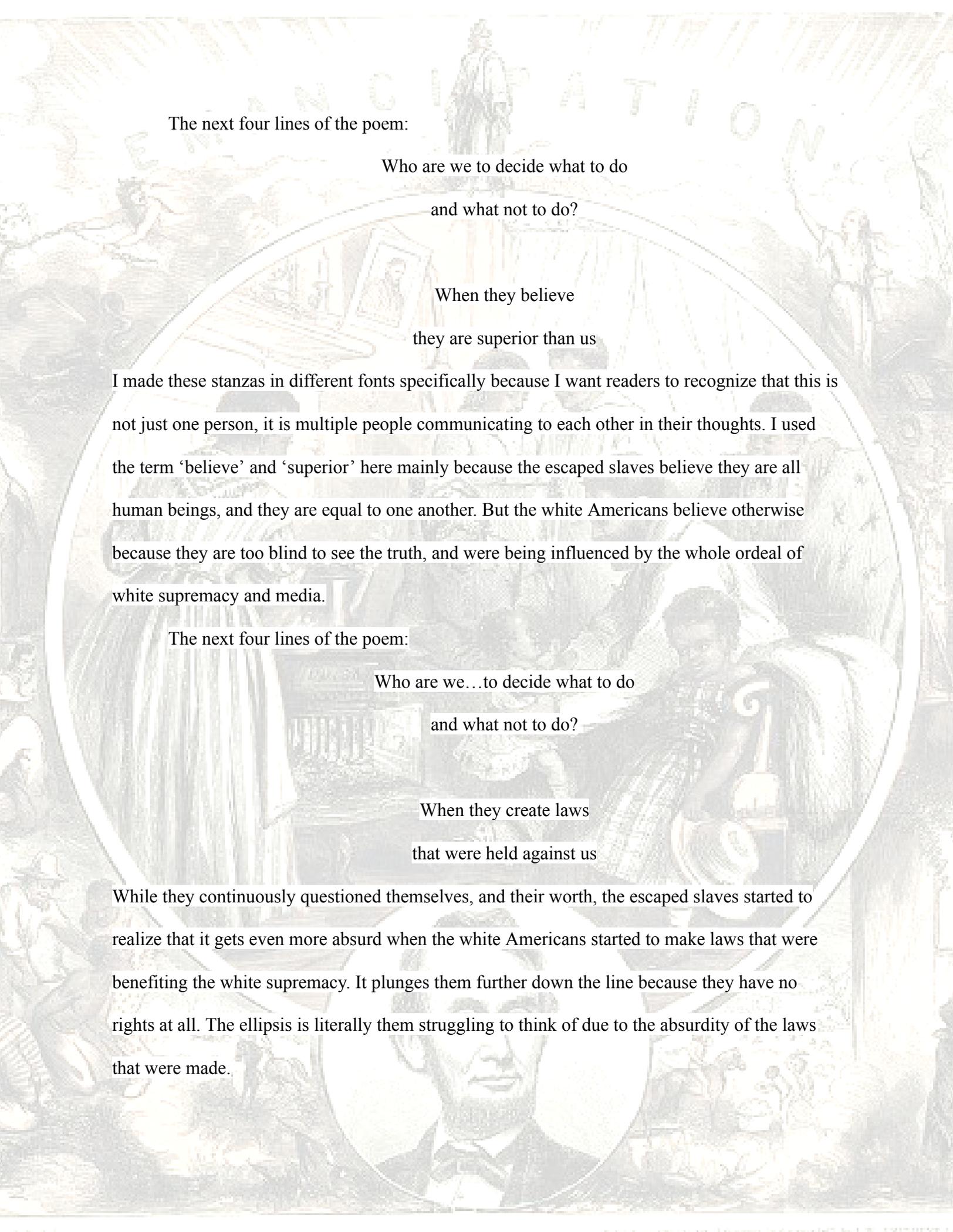
The first four lines of the poem:

Who are we to decide what to do
and what not to do?

When they are the ones
who decides everything just based on the color of our skin.

For this poem, I made every stanza into every perspective of the escaped slaves. Based on the first four lines, the first stanza was from a different perspective, while the second stanza was from another perspective. They were both questioning their worth as human beings due to the harsh treatment of the people who live in America. This means they already had no voice living in that time period, and they started to lose hope because of the inequality.



The background of the entire page is a faded, sepia-toned illustration of the Emancipation Proclamation. At the top, the word "EMANCIPATION" is written in large, spaced-out letters. In the center, a portrait of Abraham Lincoln is visible. The scene depicts a group of people, including men, women, and children, in a room that appears to be a meeting or a place of discussion. Some people are seated at a table, while others stand. The overall tone is historical and somber.

The next four lines of the poem:

Who are we to decide what to do
and what not to do?

When they believe
they are superior than us

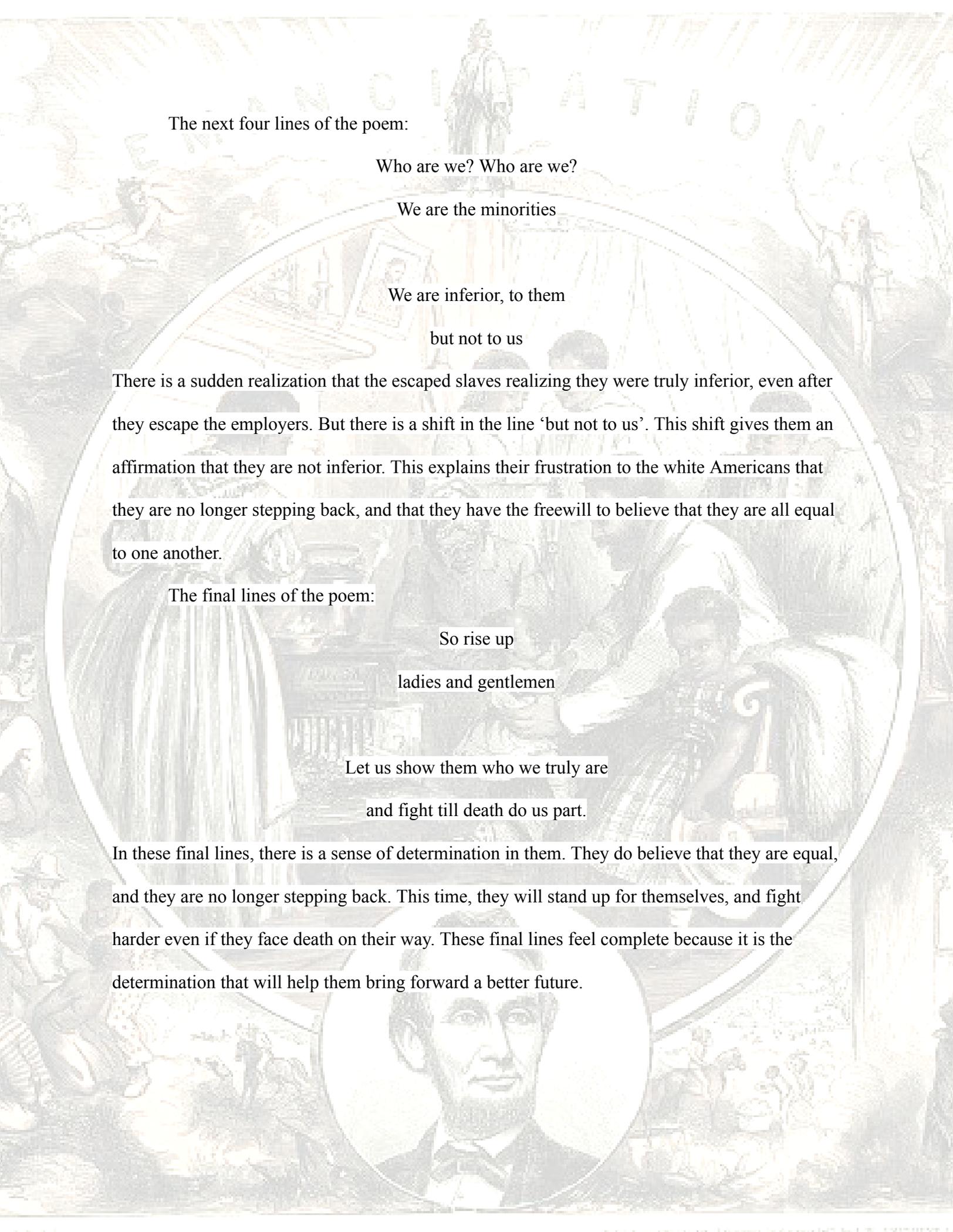
I made these stanzas in different fonts specifically because I want readers to recognize that this is not just one person, it is multiple people communicating to each other in their thoughts. I used the term 'believe' and 'superior' here mainly because the escaped slaves believe they are all human beings, and they are equal to one another. But the white Americans believe otherwise because they are too blind to see the truth, and were being influenced by the whole ordeal of white supremacy and media.

The next four lines of the poem:

Who are we...to decide what to do
and what not to do?

When they create laws
that were held against us

While they continuously questioned themselves, and their worth, the escaped slaves started to realize that it gets even more absurd when the white Americans started to make laws that were benefiting the white supremacy. It plunges them further down the line because they have no rights at all. The ellipsis is literally them struggling to think of due to the absurdity of the laws that were made.



The next four lines of the poem:

Who are we? Who are we?

We are the minorities

We are inferior, to them

but not to us

There is a sudden realization that the escaped slaves realizing they were truly inferior, even after they escape the employers. But there is a shift in the line 'but not to us'. This shift gives them an affirmation that they are not inferior. This explains their frustration to the white Americans that they are no longer stepping back, and that they have the freewill to believe that they are all equal to one another.

The final lines of the poem:

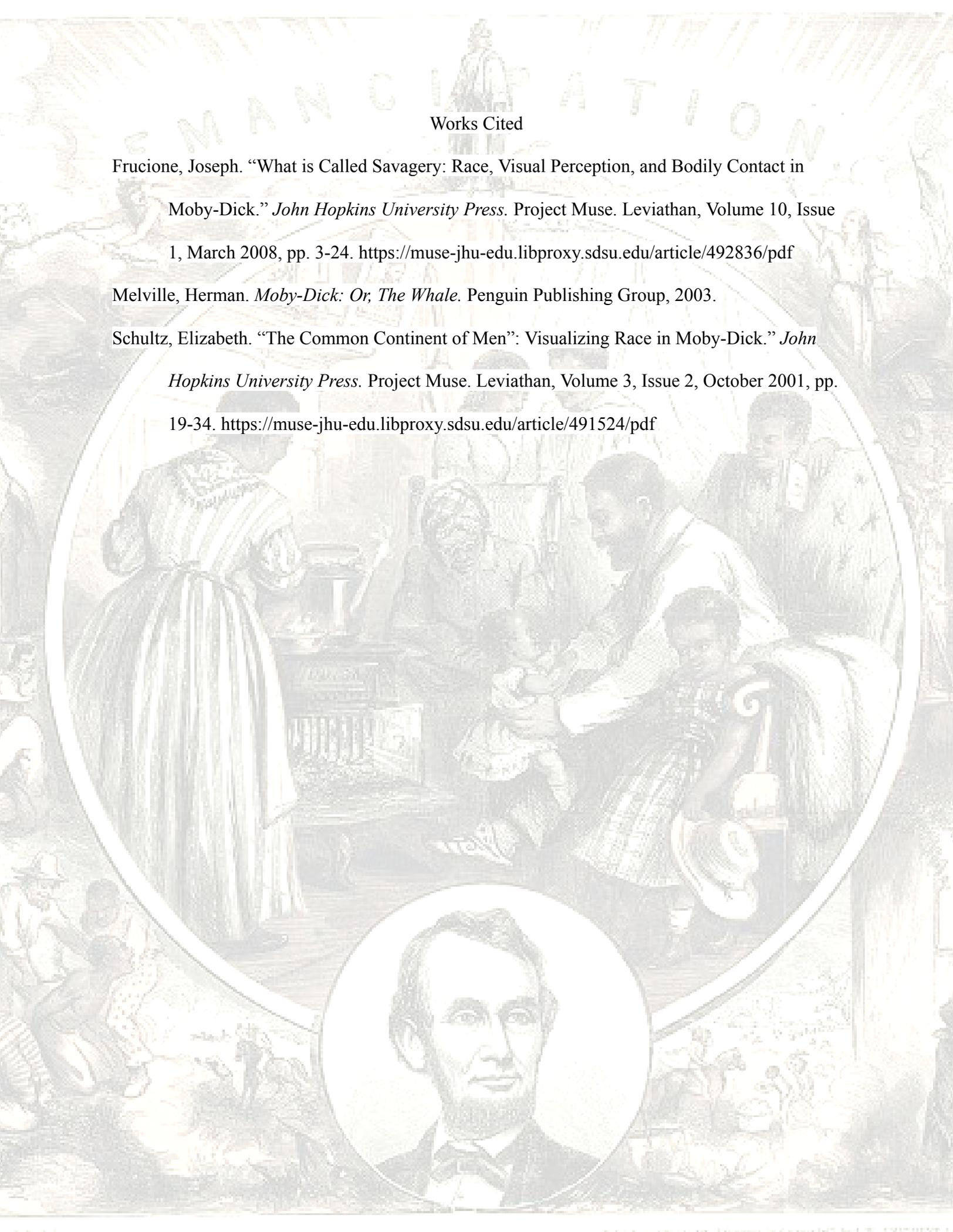
So rise up

ladies and gentlemen

Let us show them who we truly are

and fight till death do us part.

In these final lines, there is a sense of determination in them. They do believe that they are equal, and they are no longer stepping back. This time, they will stand up for themselves, and fight harder even if they face death on their way. These final lines feel complete because it is the determination that will help them bring forward a better future.



Works Cited

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