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Let's Stop Calling them "Slave Narratives": Anagrammatical Blackness in our Academic Discourse

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Recommended Citation

Coulombe, Joseph L., "Let's Stop Calling them "Slave Narratives": Anagrammatical Blackness in our Academic Discourse" (2023). *College of Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty Scholarship*. 12. https://rdw.rowan.edu/chss_facpub/12

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Dr. Joe Coulombe / English Department



College Nov. 2022 vol. 85 no. 2 English

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Joseph L. Coulombe

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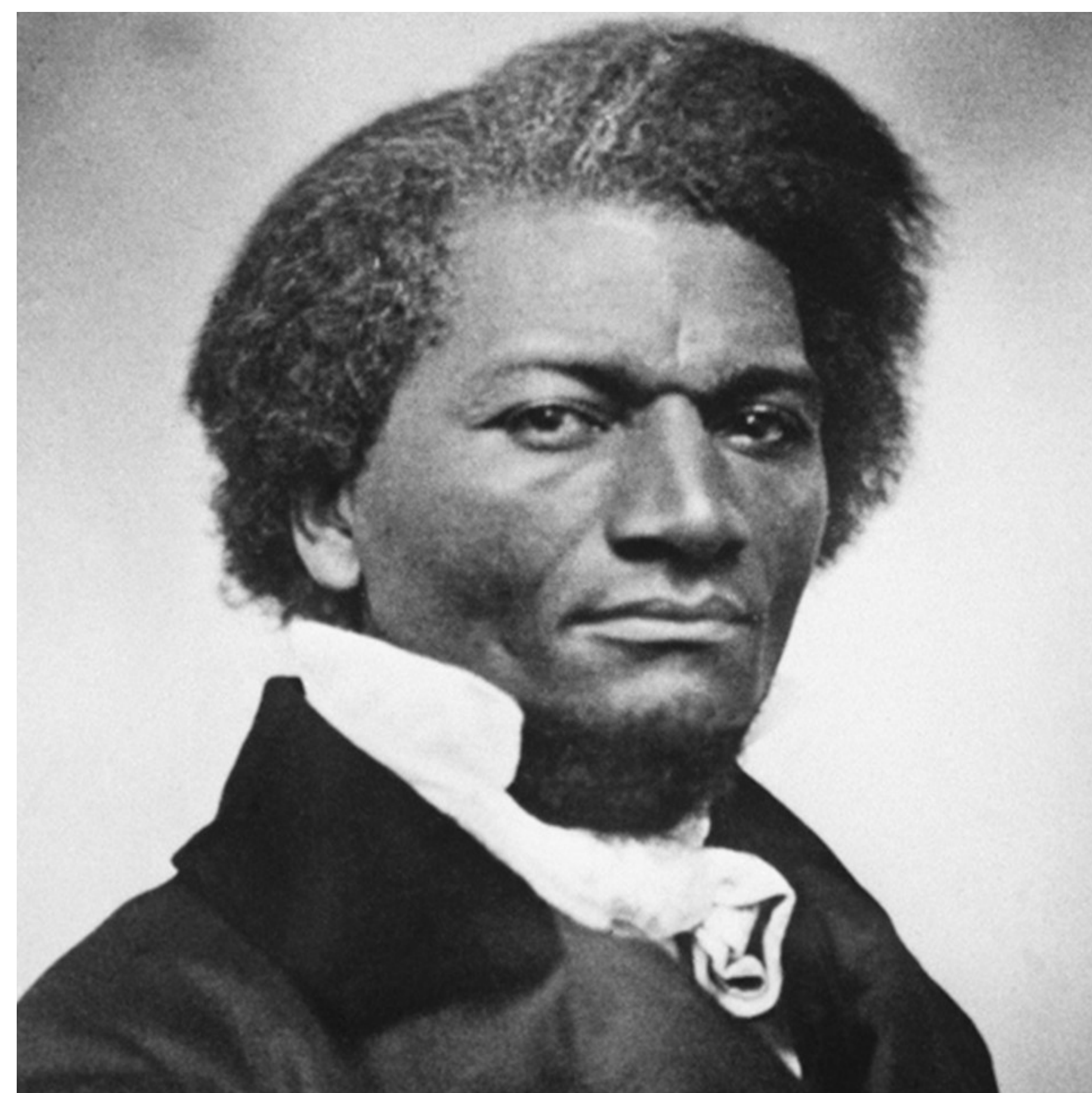


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Abstract: The label "slave narrative" is a damaging misnomer that leads to critical distortions and misrepresentations. These important texts were written by free men and women, not slaves, who had emancipated themselves from America's slave system, and they function as testimonials of self-determination that document their escape from enslavement and help to enact their own freedom. The label slave narrative, which emerged in the late 1930s during the Federal Writers Project, exemplifies "anagrammatical blackness," as theorized by Christina Sharpe. The term perpetuates a reductive framework that de-centers the writers' accomplishments and sustains the afterlives of slavery.



Harriet Jacobs,
19th-century
American author.



Frederick Douglass,
19th-century American
writer, lecturer, and
abolitionist.