

A series of vignettes unfolds across ten screens of different sizes, presenting moments from Douglass's life after he achieved freedom from slavery. While many aspects of the film are historically accurate, events do not appear in chronological order, and some scenes blend fact and fiction. Julien intended for *Lessons of the Hour* to be less an exact account of Douglass's biography and more a character study centered around the issues of race and representation that the abolitionist raised in his work.

The film also combines reconstructed scenes from Douglass's life with actual black-and-white surveillance footage of the 2015 Freddie Gray protests in Baltimore, one of the places where Douglass had been enslaved. Gray, a twenty-five-year-old Baltimore resident, was arrested and died while in police custody in April 2015. Explaining his decision to juxtapose the past and present, Julien said: "You want the images to operate on the aesthetic, intellectual, and political level, to resonate with the audience in ways which connect them to the historical issues."