



Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women (Gender and American Culture)

Rena Fraden

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"This ain't no Dreamgirls," Rhodessa Jones warns participants in the Medea Project, the theater program for incarcerated women that she founded and directs. Her expectations are grounded in reality, tempered, for example, by the fact that women are the fastest growing population in U.S. prisons. Still, Jones believes that by engaging incarcerated women in the process of developing and staging dramatic works based on their own stories, she can push them toward tapping into their own creativity, confronting the problems that landed them in prison, and taking control of their lives.

Rena Fraden chronicles the collaborative process of transforming incarcerated women's stories into productions that incorporate Greek mythology, hip-hop music, dance, and autobiography. She captures a diverse array of voices, including those of Jones and other artists, the sheriff and prison guards, and, most vividly, the women themselves. Through compelling narrative and thoughtful commentary, Fraden investigates the Medea Project's blend of art and activism and considers its limits and possibilities for enacting social change.

Rhodessa Jones is co-artistic director of the San Francisco-based performance company Cultural Odyssey and founder of the Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women. An award-winning performer, she has taught at the Yale School of Drama and the New College of California.

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