I came to America to find some kind of freedom.

I’m half Chinese, half black. I was born poor, and I grew up poor in Montego Bay and moved to Kingston when I was about sixteen for University. Somewhere at about twenty or twenty-one, it started to dawn on me that I was interested in partnering with people who identified as women. And I thought the University could be that kind of place that was edgy, breaking the boundaries—but what happened was that I was attacked by a bunch of boys on campus and sexually assaulted. So I bought a one-way ticket to the US and unwillingly became an immigrant here.

I came to America to find some kind of freedom and, when I arrived here, I found that in New York there were a lot of spaces where one could be gay, one could be lesbian, but there were few spaces where one could also be black and be safe. And so I was at the end of my rope in the search for a place to belong, when the Nuyorican Poets Cafe presented itself to me. I never imagined that I would take the most private, the most vulnerable, the most intimate parts of myself and shock audiences with passion and gusto from the stage. I never knew that such things could exist.

People come here for economics, they come here for their families, they come here for love—but many, like myself, come for sexual freedom. I have a kid who, in about ten or fifteen years, will be in the same place I will be when I left. And I want to give her the space to choose as she would choose—with freedom.

Bio:
Staceyann Chin is a Jamaican-born spoken-word poet, slam champion, performing artist, and LGBT rights political activist. Her work has been published in The New York Times and The Washington Post and the Pittsburgh Daily, and has been featured on 60 Minutes. She was also featured on The Oprah Winfrey Show, where she shared her struggles growing up as a gay person in Jamaica. She performed in and co-wrote the Tony-nominated Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam on Broadway. In 2009, Chin published her autobiographical novel, The Other Side of Paradise: A Memoir (Scribner). Chin’s latest one-woman show, MotherStruck!, was produced by Cynthia Nixon and Rosie O’Donnell. Chin credits her accomplishments to her hard-working grandmother and the pain of her mother’s absence.