

Staceyann Chin

Jamaica: slam poet, theater artist

Object: expired Jamaican passport

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.