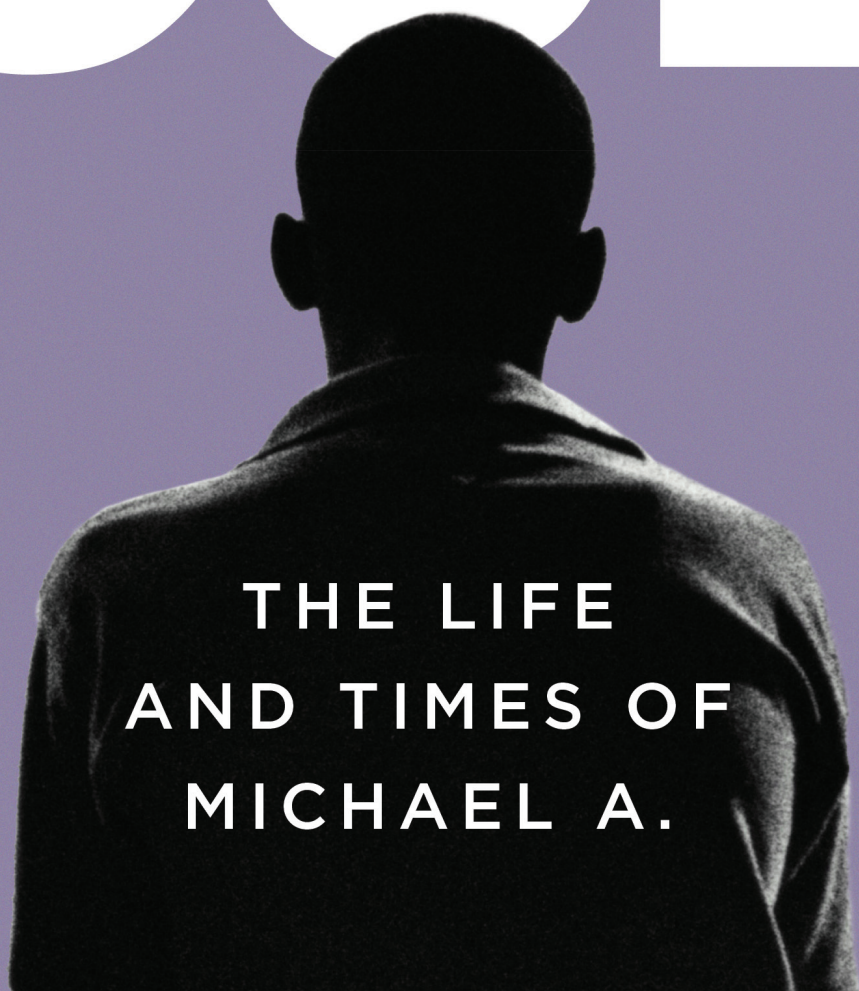


DANIELLE ALLEN

# CUZZ



THE LIFE  
AND TIMES OF  
MICHAEL A.

# I.

## GARDEN PARTY, July 2009

“D  
anielle, phone call for you. It’s your dad.”

I broke away from a conversation with my husband’s cousins—from glancing, distracted talk about the kids who were playing yards away in their floral sundresses under a soft English garden-party sun. Rising from the picnic table, I took the cell phone from him and walked a few steps.

“Hi, Dad.”

“Danielle, it’s Michael.”

My father’s voice, the careful, clipped speech of a retired professor, came from across the Atlantic, from Maryland through the ether, but sounded as if it were miles beneath the seas, crackling, wispy as if through the first ever transatlantic cables.

“He’s dead.”

“*What?*”

“Dead. They found him shot in a car.”

“What?”

“Dead.”

“I’m coming.”

Michael. *My* cousin. My baby cuz.

Sometimes on English spring mornings a gauzy haze clings to the air. This, though, was July and, now, afternoon, but that same sort of whiteness suddenly seemed to wrap the sky and the surrounding willows, and I near collapsed, staggered into my husband’s arms, and said “Jim, we have to go.”

“What?”

“Michael’s dead.”

“*What?*”

“Dead. We have to go.”

Straightaway go, we had to go, to South Central.

And so we left.