

A READERS' GROUP GUIDE



for YA readers and book clubs



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ISN'T BEING HUMAN ENOUGH?

When teen social activist and history buff Kezi Smith is killed under mysterious circumstances after attending a social justice rally, her devastated sister Happi and their family are left reeling in the aftermath. As Kezi becomes another immortalized victim in the fight against police brutality, Happi begins to question the idealized way her sister is remembered. Perfect. Angelic.

One of the good ones.

Even as the phrase rings wrong in her mind—why are only certain people deemed worthy to be missed?—Happi and her sister Genny embark on a journey to honor Kezi in their own way, using an heirloom copy of *The Negro Motorist Green Book* as their guide. But there's a twist to Kezi's story that no one could've ever expected—one that will change everything all over again.

PRAISE FOR ONE OF THE GOOD ONES

"A thrilling and thrillingly intricate, genre-bending blend of mystery, road-trip, and coming of age novel. *One of the Good Ones* investigates intergenerational racial trauma through the eyes of three very different sisters while it testifies to the power of love and hope in spite of such trauma. Astonishing!"

—**LAURA RUBY, TWO-TIME NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST AND AUTHOR OF BONE GAP**

"Maika and Maritza are conjurers, unearthing strange and sublime ways to tell a story that's both America's oldest and today's newest.

One of the Good Ones is magic."

—**DAMON YOUNG, AUTHOR OF WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU MAKES YOU BLACKER**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



MAIKA MOULITE is a Miami native and the daughter of Haitian immigrants. She earned a bachelor's in marketing from Florida State University and an MBA from the University of Miami. When she's not using her digital prowess to help nonprofits and major organizations tell their stories online, she's sharpening her skills as a PhD student at Howard University. She's the eldest of four sisters and loves young adult fantasy, fierce female leads, and laughing.



MARITZA MOULITE graduated from the University of Florida with a bachelor's in women's studies and the University of Southern California with a master's in journalism. She's worked in various capacities for NBC News, CNN, and *USA TODAY*. An admirer of Michelle Obama, Maritza is a perpetual student and blogs at Daily Ellement. Her favorite song is "September" by Earth, Wind & Fire.

DISCUSSION THEMES IN *ONE OF THE GOOD ONES*

- ★ Racism
- ★ The Black Lives Matter Movement
- ★ Activism
- ★ Family
- ★ Justice
- ★ Law Enforcement
- ★ Friendship
- ★ Identity
- ★ The LGBTQIA+ Community
- ★ Allyship

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. How do the characters' race impact their awareness of the world around them? How do they have to think about both physical and emotional safety?
2. The refrain of "one of the good ones" is evident throughout this book. What does this phrase mean? Kezi was described as "one of the good ones" and Shaqueria was not. How did the world react to their arrests and subsequent events?
3. What does Kezi value about herself, and how does that align (or not) with what her parents value about her, and what her sisters value? How does that contrast with what society values?
4. The Smith family is going through a time of profound grief. How are they each reacting to it and channeling it? What are the pressures from society on how they channel their grief?
5. Describe how the three sisters react differently to growing up in the same household and in society. How do these differences affect the way they interact with each other?
6. Guilt manifests itself in a variety of ways throughout the book. Give examples of ways in which Kezi, Happi, and Genny express guilt and how their guilt drives and influences their actions.
7. How do the actions of the past shape the narrative of the present? In what ways are the characters aware of this legacy, and how do they react to it? Are there times when they have to change and adapt from it? How does a character's race affect the way that these legacies are passed down?
8. How does Kezi's relationship with Ximena intersect with her relationship with her family and with how she is viewed in society?
9. Discuss what allyship looks like in *One of the Good Ones* in terms of supporting the Black community and the LGBTQIA+ community. How does that intersect in real life?
10. *One of the Good Ones* opens with the optimistic introduction to the 1948 edition of *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. Reread this statement now. Discuss whether this sentiment is still present and/or relevant today.

Extension Activities

ART AND ACTIVISM

Poetry

Read and reflect on the following poems. How did these poems inform your reading of *One of the Good Ones*?

- » “Match” by Jason Reynolds (poets.org/poem/match-0)
- » “I, Too” by Langston Hughes (poets.org/poem/i-too)
- » The Poems of Protest, Resistance, and Empowerment collection assembled by the Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/101581/poems-of-protest-resistance-and-empowerment)

Cover Art

Review these magazine covers by famed artist Kadir Nelson. Discuss how they connect to the themes of this book.

- » Kadir Nelson’s cover painting for the July 2020 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine and the accompanying interview (www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/kadir-nelson-cover-artwork-july-2020-1014011/).
- » *Say Their Names* and the accompanying close reading from *The New Yorker* (www.newyorker.com/culture/cover-story/cover-story-2020-06-22).

Music

Protest songs have been the soundtrack of social movements throughout history, articulating the urgency of positive and necessary social change. Listen to some of the songs identified in “Fight the Power: 40 Essential Protest Songs” (www.pressreader.com/usa/rolling-stone-usa/20200804/283227330444585). Which of these would you include for a soundtrack for *One of the Good Ones*? What other songs would you add?

THE BOOK, AND BEYOND

“Sundown Towns” in America, Then and Now

The Green Book: The Black Travelers’ Guide to Jim Crow America guides the cross-country trip to “sundown towns” that Kezi planned and which Happi, Genny, Ximena and Derek eventually take.

Read the article “Sundown Towns’: Midwest Confronts Its Complicated Racial Legacy” (www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2017/0327/Sundown-towns-Midwest-confronts-its-complicated-racial-legacy). What are the effects of “sundown towns” we’re seeing in America today?

Black Women as Victims of Violence

Discuss how the following articles and video shine a light on the urgent need to demand justice for Black women. How do the articles tie back to *One of the Good Ones*?

- » “#SayHerName Puts Spotlight on Black Women Killed by Police” by Robin Young and Serena McMahon (www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/06/16/black-women-deaths-protests)
- » “Breonna Taylor’s Death Further Illustrates the Invisibility of Black Women and Resurrects a Discussion About ‘Missing White Woman Syndrome’” by Maia Niguel Hoskin (www.forbes.com/sites/maiahoskin/2020/06/28/breonna-taylors-death-further-illustrates-the-invisibility-of-black-women-and-resurrects-a-discussion-about-missing-white-woman-syndrome/)
- » “The Urgency of Intersectionality” lecture by Kimberlé Crenshaw (www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=18&v=akOe5-UsQ2o&feature=emb_logo)

Black Americans and Social Justice Movements

Respond to the following passages and/or video clips and make connections to *One of the Good Ones*.

- » President Barack Obama eulogized Representative John R. Lewis at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. In the eulogy, Obama connected the protests, marches and unrest during the Civil Rights Movement to what is happening today. Here is an excerpt from his eulogy (full transcript here: www.npr.org/2020/07/30/897409894/transcript-what-a-gift-john-lewis-was-obama-eulogizes-his-friend-and-hero):

“Bull Connor may be gone. But today we witness with our own eyes police officers kneeling on the necks of Black Americans. George Wallace may be gone. But we can witness our federal government sending agents to use tear gas and batons against peaceful demonstrators. We may no longer have to guess the number of jellybeans in a jar in order to cast a ballot. But even as we sit here, there are those in power are doing their darnedest to discourage people from voting—by closing polling locations, and targeting minorities and students with restrictive ID laws, and attacking our voting rights with surgical precision, even undermining the postal service in the runup to an election that is going to be dependent on mailed-in ballots so people don’t get sick. Now, I know this is a celebration of John’s life. There are some who might say we shouldn’t dwell on such things. But that’s why I’m talking about it. John Lewis devoted his time on this Earth fighting the very attacks on democracy and what’s best in America that we are seeing circulate right now.”

- » United States Attorney General William Barr was examined by the House Judiciary Committee in July 2020. Representative Pramila Jayapal questioned him about the use of federal force against US citizens who were peacefully assembled in order to support the Black Lives Matter movement. Read about and watch their exchange (www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/pramila-jayapal-exposes-william-barr-hypocrisy-testimony-1035254/).

FURTHER READINGS/RESOURCES

Black Lives Matter

For more information about the Black Lives Matter movement, visit their official website at blacklivesmatter.com.

Resources for and about the LGBTQIA+ community

- » **The LGBTQIA+ Resource Center of University of California, Davis** website provides a list of definitions and terms with the note: “The terms and definitions below are always evolving and changing and often mean different things to different people. They are provided below as a starting point for discussion and understanding. This Glossary has been collectively built and collected by the staff members of the LGBTQIA+ Resource Center since the early 2000s. This list has evolved over time.” Visit this link for the full list: lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary.html
- » **The It Gets Better Project’s** mission statement states, “The It Gets Better Project inspires people across the globe to share their stories and remind the next generation of LGBTQIA+ youth that hope is out there, and it will get better” (itgetsbetter.org/).
- » **The Center for Disease Control** has compiled a list of resources for LGBTQIA+ youth, friends, parents, teachers and other educators. Visit this link for the full list: www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm.
- » **BGD (Black Girl Dangerous) Press** amplifies the voices of queer and trans people of color. Visit their website for information and resources: www.bgdblog.org
- » **The National Black Justice Coalition (nbjc.org/)**’s executive director David Johns talks about how some black members of the LGBTQIA+ community are opting, instead of “coming out,” to “invite in’ those in their lives who are concerned, competent and compassionate”: www.theroot.com/why-some-black-lgbtqia-folks-are-done-coming-out-1840507460.
- » **Resources for those exploring the topic of the LGBTQIA+ community and faith:**
 - **The Human Rights Campaigns:** A Christian Conversation Guide: hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/Christian_Conversation_Guide.pdf
 - **The Trevor Project: LGBTQIA+ Religion:** www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr_support_center/lgbtq-religion/
 - **GLAAD: Many Voices Highlights Black LGBTQIA+ Christians in Video Campaign:** www.glaad.org/blog/many-voices-highlights-black-lgbt-christians-video-campaign
- » **The Center for Black Equity** connects “members of the Black LGBTQ+ community with information and resources to educate, engage and empower their fight for equity and access” www.centerforblackequity.org.

Other works about the power of protest featuring Black female protagonists

- » *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
- » *Piecing Me Together* by Renée Watson
- » *A Good Kind of Trouble* by Lisa Moore Ramée
- » *This Is My America* by Kim Johnson
- » *Together We Rise: Behind the Scenes at the Protest Heard Around the World* by The Women’s March Organizers and Condé Nast
- » *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices* edited by Cheryl Willis Hudson and Wade Hudson
- » *Black Girl Dangerous on Race, Queerness, Class and Gender* by Mia McKenzie
- » *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and asha bandele

BEHIND THE BOOK

A letter from authors Maika Moulite and Maritza Mouline on the inspiration for *One of the Good Ones*

In 2013, our family laid to rest our great-aunt *Tant* Moul. She was our grandmother's best friend and older sister. Grieving was as hard and painful as expected. But, because she was an older woman with chronic illnesses, we knew what to expect. After her casket was pushed into the crypt, we paid our final respects and said goodbye. As we walked away, our eyes swept over the countless other plaques and names of the departed on that mausoleum wall and one name stopped us where we were.

Trayvon Martin.

We had never known him, but we grew up with boys just like him. He was only four months older than our youngest sister, and at different points in their journeys, they had even attended the same middle school. Miami is a big place, full of everything from glamorous beaches and nightclubs to ignored and under-resourced neighborhoods. But his Miami was our Miami. He had gone to the schools that were our "home" institutions, the ones we would've attended if we hadn't been bussed away to magnet programs. His high school was less than two miles from our house in an ethnically diverse community not unlike The Retreat at Twin Lakes in Sanford, Florida. The place where he died.

There on that wall was another reminder of a stolen young black life, a life not in our orbit but a part of it all the same. We have shed countless, heavy tears for the verdict of that case and for the other blackboys and men who shared his fate in some form or another: Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, and Freddie Gray. We saw irrelevant details about their lives brought up and dissected as if in explanation for what happened to them.

And we were scared. For ourselves as black women, and even more so as older siblings of two younger sisters. We wrote this book because enmeshed in our shared memories are Sandra Bland, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Charleena Lyles, Rekia Boyd, Layleen Cubilette-Polanco, and Aiyana Stanley-Jones. There are countless individuals we haven't listed but we lift them up too. They aren't as well-known as others perhaps, but they were here just the same.

A report by the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality found that "adults view black girls as less innocent and more adultlike than their white peers" and these black girls are more likely to be disciplined and suspended. Let's not forget the young people who do end up growing up too fast when they are left behind. The teens who lose weight and miss one hundred days' worth of school after their twelve-year-old



brothers are killed. The toddlers who comfort their mothers as they mourn the death of their loved ones in real time.

We chose the title *One of the Good Ones* because it's something that "well-intentioned" people say all the time without realizing how harmful it is. "One of the good ones" is usually code for a person our country deems worthy. The importance is usually tied to level of education, income, class, zip code, gender identity, and sexual orientation. If most or all of those acceptable boxes are checked, *then* we care. One of the characters we created is an aggrandizement of those people who believe they are doing good when they elevate a black person with a "worthy" background, in lieu of someone else they deem "unworthy." But there is no competition. There is no allotment for who deserves justice and who does not.

All this really serves to do is divide and dehumanize us. Too often, when police brutality is discussed, the world asks the wrong questions. Did the victim smoke weed? Had they ever been arrested? Did they get into trouble while they were in school? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then they were not one of the good ones. There is the implied justification for the brutalizing of their bodies.

We also use "one of the good ones" a few times throughout the story to depict how it all depends on who is looking through the lens. Kezi and Happi each internalized what it means to be "good" in different ways. Kezi was working on casting aside the bigoted teachings of her parents and church while learning to fully embrace herself, sexuality included. Happi was consumed by the brightness of her sister's future and the strong relationships Kezi had with their family—two things she believed she lacked. We hope that by the end of our book, readers leave reminded that being human is more than enough to deserve life and love.

Kezi was just about perfect by our society's eyes, and her black skin still made her a threat, dangerous. If we're honest, a tiny worm of a thought has stayed with us (and, before that, our immigrant parents), our whole lives: if we were respectful—respectable—and soft-spoken and polite and good-natured and *yes, ma'am* and *no, sir* and smiling, perhaps we would be safe. But the truth is, that can't save us. It takes a systematic disruption of how the world views us. Unfortunately, it takes books like this to humanize black people and show that, like everyone else, we deserve to have peace.



Also by Maika Moulite and Maritza Moulite: DEAR HAITI, LOVE ALAINE



Alaine Beuparlant has heard about Haiti all her life... But the stories were always passed down from her dad—and her mom, when she wasn't too busy with her high-profile newscaster gig. But when Alaine's life goes a bit sideways, it's time to finally visit Haiti herself.

What she learns about Haiti's proud history as the world's first black republic (with its even prouder people) is one thing, but what she learns about her own family is another. Suddenly, the secrets Alaine's mom has been keeping, including a family curse that has spanned generations, can no longer be avoided. It's a lot to handle, without even mentioning that Alaine is also working for her aunt's nonprofit, which sends underprivileged kids to school and boasts one *annoyingly* charming intern. But if anyone can do it all...it's Alaine.

★ **A Well-Read Black Girl
book club pick**

★ **An Indies Introduce pick**

★ **A Hoopla YA Book Club pick**

★ “Sisters Maika and Maritza Moulite deliver a phenomenal coming-of-age story with this stunning novel...The authors deliver a smart and witty protagonist in Alaine... the setting takes on a life of its own, plunging readers into Haiti's rich cultural traditions, breathtaking landscape, and vibrant people alongside Alaine, who will quickly become a beloved character amongst teens.”

—*Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

★ “Seamlessly blending story lines and allusions to Haiti's history and culture, the authors create an indelible, believable character in Alaine—naive, dynamic, and brutally honest—who stretches and grows as her remarkable, affectingly rendered family relationships do.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, STARRED REVIEW

“An enchanting and engrossing novel full of wit and laughter along with a tantalizing generational mystery. Alaine Beuparlant is that rare character who feels like your complicated but indispensable friend, one you wish you could stay in touch with and hear more fascinating and absorbing stories from long after finishing the book.”

—Edwidge Danticat, author of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

“The Moulite Sisters have given us a refreshing and balanced view of Haiti through the eyes of Alaine, a remarkable, funny, and whip-smart young Haitian-American coming to terms with both herself and her heritage. *Dear Haiti, Love Alaine* is, at its heart, also an American story—necessary, hopeful, and enlightening.”

—Ibi Zoboi, author of *American Street*, National Book Award Finalist

“Sisters Maika and Maritza Moulites' debut is nothing short of extraordinarily loving. The novel portrays Haiti, too often reduced to grim images of poverty and human suffering in modern fiction, as a challenging and beautiful nation of proud and shining souls.”

—Ben Philippe, author of *The Field Guide to the North American Teenager*

“I loved going on this journey with Alaine and once I stepped into her world I didn't want to stop until I finished—but I wanted to savor this book because I didn't want it to end. How's that for conflicting emotions?”

—Sarah Bean Thompson, Youth Services Manager, The Library Center

