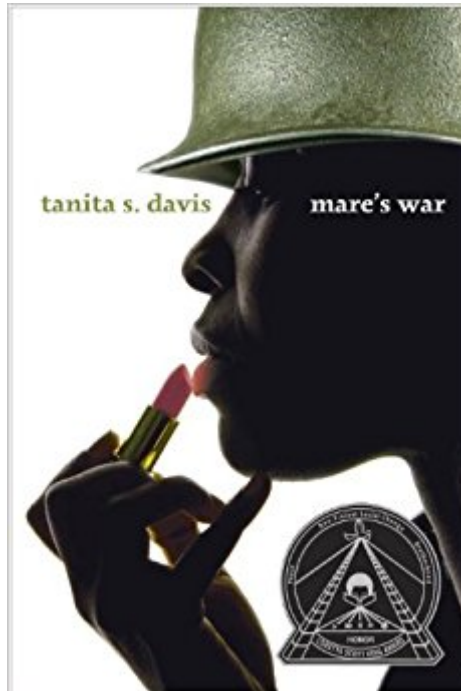




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# Mare's War



## Synopsis

Meet Mare, a World War II veteran and a grandmother like no other. She was once a willful teenager who escaped her less than perfect life in the deep South and lied about her age to join the African American Battalion of the Women's Army Corps. Now she is driving her granddaughtersâtwo willful teenagers in their own riteâon a cross-country road trip. The girls are initially skeptical of Mare's flippy wigs and stilletos, but they soon find themselves entranced by the story she has to tell, and readers will be too. Told in alternating chapters, half of which follow Mare through her experiences as a WAC and half of which follow Mare and her granddaughters on the road in the present day, this novel introduces readers to a larger-than-life character and a fascinating chapter in African American history.

## Book Information

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Paperback: 352 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 21 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #423,202 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #151 in Books > Teens >

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Military

Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Grade 7-10âOn a parent-mandated cross-country road trip with Mere, their unpredictable grandmother, 15-year-old Octavia and 17-year-old Tali make the transformation from complaining, self-absorbed teens to observant, supportive family members. Mere promises not to smoke if the sisters promise not to use earphones on their way to a family reunion. And then she begins to tell her life story. As the miles pass from California across the southern states, the girls become

intrigued with memories of Mere's harsh childhood of domestic work and her struggle to protect herself and younger sister from their widowed mother's lecherous boyfriend. Mere's account of her war years is full of historical detail and lively personal anecdotes about the training, treatment, duties, and social life in her African-American regiment of the Women's Army Corps both on assignment in the U.S. and in the European Theater during 1944 and 1945. Octavia and Tali write postcards home to family and friends revealing their adolescent reactions to what they see and hear. Their bickering subsides as they begin to understand the experiences, people, and decisions that shaped their grandmother and the family bond they all share. Told in alternating chapters of Then and Now, this contemporary intergenerational story resounds with mutual exasperation, criticism, discovery, and humor. Octavia and Tali are believable and at times devious as they try to escape Mere's scrutiny. A steady travelogue, realistic banter, memorable characters, and moments of tension, insight, and understanding make this an appealing selection.â "Gerry Larson, Durham School of the Arts, NC Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review, Kirkus Reviews, May 1, 2009:"Absolutely essential reading."From the Hardcover edition.

Told from the alternating perspectives of 15 year-old Octavia (an African-American teenager from California) and Mare, her elderly grandmother who enlisted in the Women's Army Corps during World War II at the age of 17, this novel tells a heartwarming tale of intergenerational bonding while also filling a gap in historical knowledge. Mare narrates two chapters (all entitled "Then") for every one that Octavia narrates (all entitled "Now") as they drive from California to Alabama with Octavia's older sister, Tali. Along the way, Mare tells her granddaughters the story of how she came to enlist in the army during WWII, trained in the south, and served overseas in England and France. Mare's story, which comprises the bulk of the novel, addresses a number of serious issues"attempted child sexual abuse, family strife, poverty, racial discrimination and inequality, lesbianism"as it highlights the numerous "wars" that Mare fought while growing up and serving in the Army in the 1940s. Along the way, Octavia and Tali come to appreciate their grandmother's struggles and learn more about American history, all the while developing stronger familial bonds of their own with each other and with their grandmother. The complementary narratives depict deeply contrasting stories of growing up as a Black woman during two different periods in American history. Educational without

being pedantic, this novel serves as an entertaining way for adolescents to learn about and appreciate an often neglected aspect of American history.

The dialogue and voice in this book are simply amazing. For the first time in my life, I have actually considered writing fan mail to the author, it's that good. Ms. Davis captures the southern voice without butchering the English language by creating new spellings or making a caricature of it. I know people who talk like this. I hear these voices every day and Ms. Davis recreated them. I want to hug her and say thank you for doing it right. Without the voice, this would simply be yet another YA historical fiction novel about a part of WWII that is sadly overlooked, with an over used road/travel metaphor. Without the complexity of the character of Mare and the voice in which she speaks, this would be easily forgettable and perhaps only worthy of 3 stars. The book itself talks about Mare's time with the Women's Army Corps in flashbacks interlaced with a road trip with the much older Marey's obnoxious and entitled granddaughters. Though I found Marey's story far more interesting than the present day road trip story, I still see how the road trip story was necessary to expand on the changes between generations and their lack of appreciation for what they have and understanding of where they come from. My only criticism is that Octavia acts more like a pampered 80+ year old woman than her grandmother does and the character of Tali is generally unlikeable through much of the book. It is also refreshing to see a book aimed towards teens that admits that not all women have business being mothers. That concept is still revolutionary, even in 2015.

Tanita Davis's "Mare's War" is a good example of a book which can entertain as well as educate. It presents an interesting glimpse into a historical reality that most people are probably only vaguely familiar with - the service of African American Women's Army Corps members during World War II. But at the same time, the book is good fiction. The believable, engaging and dynamic characters hook us in while the plot offers enough suspense to pull us along. The book alternates between "Now" sections in which Octavia and her petulant older sister are forced into an extended road trip with "Mare", their grandmother, in order to go to some mysterious family reunion, and "Then" sections in which Mare reveals events of her childhood and how she ran away to serve in the Army without her mother's consent. Although annoyed with missing their summer, the girls get drawn into Mare's story despite themselves. The "Then" sections are, in my opinion, the more vivid and engaging sections. Mare's narrative voice and dialect add life and humor to the story. Her sheer hard-headedness get her through her fear and enable her to do her duty with pride, even in the face of covert and overt racism. The "Now" sections primarily serve to frame Mare's story and wrap it up

in a tidy package. As the story progresses, however, Octavia and Talitha develop and grow in a way that gives them importance in themselves. There are some minor flaws with the book. I was somewhat bothered by the use of the present tense in Mare's story - after all, she is supposedly telling her granddaughters about events well in the past. I understand why Ms. Davis chose that route, however. Past-tense narration would not have the immediacy that's so engaging in Mare's story. There's also an incident that takes place on the troop transport to Europe in which a character is severely injured, possibly dead. We don't hear any more about her for several pages, at which point we learn rather off-handedly that she's fine and dandy. And finally, either their road trip really was extremely meandering, or else Ms. Davis took some artistic license with her geography. At one point they are entering New Mexico. Many pages later they are back in Arizona, then a few short pages later they are in central Texas. There are few surprises in the book - most events can be guessed well in advance. But the book doesn't hinge on the suspense of what happens next - we sense from the beginning that everything will wrap up tidily. The drama comes rather from the dynamics between the characters as they learn more about their family and themselves and how the characters grow into themselves and closer to each other through their experiences. I recommend this book for junior high and high school kids of all races as an antidote to white-washed history texts that often leave blacks feeling like slavery was blacks' only "contribution" to history. It's important for all kids to be aware of the contributions of black women during World War II, and this book provides an excellent vehicle for that understanding.

I would highly recommend this book to be a part of any middle or high school library collection. Easy to lose oneself in Mare's story as I imagined Tali and Octavia must have done on their cross-country road trip.

I liked the idea of talking about a part of history that is often ignored. More books should address women of color and their contributions to our nation. Plus this tale brings in the bonds of family and how loose family ties can and should be tightened.

Well written for the teenager or adult. Brought back memories of my Army Life. Told from a grandma's point of view to her young granddaughters on a long vacation they took.

Thank you for responding so quickly. The item was as you indicated and I received it in a timely manner.

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