

[Archive]: World War II Letters from Members of the Mixed-Race Community known as the Ramapo Mountain Indians or Jackson Whites New York and New Jersey: 1940-1945 \$4000



A collection of 30 letters and two cards from 22 different members of the Hillburn, New York community (on the New Jersey border), 23 of them from soldiers stationed throughout the United States, Europe, and the Pacific, to various community and family members. Additionally, there are eight newspaper clippings, most about Hillburn residents. Very good or better letters with tears from opening.

A correspondence of messages sent home from members of the mixed-race community known as the “Ramapo Mountain Indians” or “Jackson Whites” while stationed in Europe during World War II. The soldiers wrote home to their community about the goings on of their various tours of duties.

Racial tensions come up throughout the collection including letters reflecting widely varying acceptance of black soldiers from a sign that read, “Nigger if you can read this run” to interracial sports, although it isn’t always clear where on the spectrum of race the writers consider themselves to be: “The white boys here are all right we play ball together...” As well as derision of dark-skinned blacks such as “there is a nigger down here... blue and ugly,” “I don’t know how I would act in civilian life again... away from these big black niggers for good.” One letter from a soldier who joked about turning into a “cracker. I hate all the northerners and especially you Jackson whites... I will try to tell you niggers how it is... We have niggers down here that can’t read and write.” Some interesting units are featured here including two letters from a member of the 100th Pursuit Squadron of the Tuskegee Airmen, while stationed at Tuskegee, Alabama, one of which references Colonel Benjamin Davis, and two letters from the two segregated African-American infantry divisions, the 92nd and 93rd.

A letter dated December 12, 1941 from Raymond Powell, serving with the 350th Field Artillery, Louisiana, reads, “I am in the hospital now... my foot is bad and the doctor’s here can’t help me so they are going to send me to New Orleans Hospital that is a real Government Hospital... My foot is really bad and I can’t do much walking on it, so if I can get out I am going to do it... I’ve got so many addresses of girls all over the country I don’t know who is who. You know the army will get them all right, Black ones, white, red, blue, yellow I am going to get a lots of yellow ones when I get over in Japan if I get there. With guns. They say they are going to take men in the army from 18-44 and 44-64. Well that will bring Howard in here. I would like to see him with a gun over his back marching toward Japan.” Another later letter dated September 18, 1944 from PFC Arthur C. Perry, 106thQMC Bn M6L, APO 403 reads, “I have been here for seven weeks. Have saw little fighting now and then not too much. We are carrying troops and supply near front few days up there isn’t no play house each day brings us closer to the end of this fight. Where we go from here God only knows.”

Hillburn is focal point of an often disparaged and occasionally feared mixed-race community known as the Ramapo Indians or Jackson-Whites, an isolated group that has lived in the remote hills of New York and New Jersey since the Revolutionary War. The community’s origins are subject to much debate. Researchers have suggested they came from various mixes of freedmen and escaped slaves from Dutch landowners, Native Americans, Hessian deserters, and prostitutes brought to America to service the British troops by an officer named Jackson. Many of common surnames, such as Van Dunk, testify to their Dutch heritage.

The tribe is recognized by New Jersey but not by the United States. Some think the community was predominantly Native American, but most academics believe it is primarily of black ancestry with some white and Native American intermixed. In these letters, there is no mention of anything related to Native-Americans; rather, some writers refer to their people as “colored,” “niggers,” and “Jackson whites.”

This fascinating collection provides considerable insight into the thoughts and attitude of soldiers from a mixed race community that was looked down upon by white and black New Yorkers alike. [\[BTC#423008\]](#)