

# 28 Greats

*A Celebration of African-American Art and Artists*



E. Simms Campbell at his drawing board.

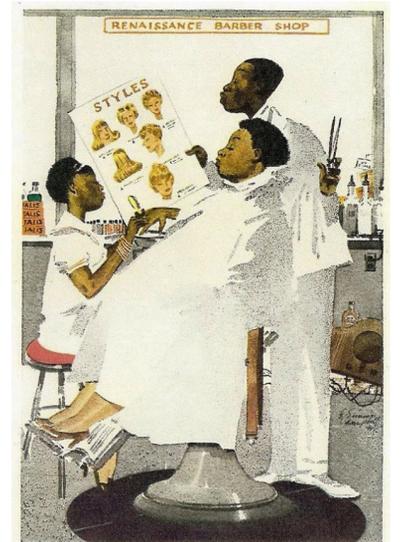
When thinking of twentieth-century illustrators, the name **Elmer Simms Campbell** (1906-1971) may not come to mind for some as easily as N.C. Wyeth, Maxfield Parrish, or Norman Rockwell. But E. Simms Campbell, as he is known, was among the most successful commercial artists of his generation. Born in St. Louis, Campbell was raised in Chicago, where he graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago. Later moving to New York to study at the National Academy of Design, he soon began receiving commissions from leading periodicals for his cartoon illustrations.

It was his work for a new publication, *Esquire*, that began his career in 1933. In addition to his many full-page cartoons and illustrations, Campbell was also the creator of *Esqy*, the magazine's mustachioed, gentleman bon vivant (a less refined, less epicurean version of *The New Yorker's* mascot figurehead, Eustace Tilley). *Esqy* (on the magazine's cover, top right, and as a promotional statuette, bottom right) was the cover star of *Esquire* for more than twenty-five years before he was gradually replaced with stylishly-designed covers that have come to define the sophistication of the 1950s and 1960s (for some years, though, the dot over the *i* in *Esquire* featured *Esqy's* face). One of Campbell's popular *Esquire* features was his watercolor illustrations of harem girls (*Esquire* was clearly a magazine aimed at men of a very different generation). Despite the popularity of his illustrations, his being African-American, according to cartoonist and comics historian Robert C. Harvey, was kept hidden from the public as long as possible by the publisher and the distributor to retain readership in the segregated south. Over the years he would create illustrations for other periodicals, including *The New Yorker* and *Ebony*. While his steady work included the nationally-syndicated one-panel comic strip *Cuties* (which was, let us say, definitely of its time), other examples of his art are telling commentaries on society, such as *Renaissance Barber Shop* (right, center). One of his illustrations, *A Night-Club Map of Harlem* (1932, below), has achieved a kind of historical significance, recording the popular clubs, restaurants, and musicians during the Harlem Renaissance.

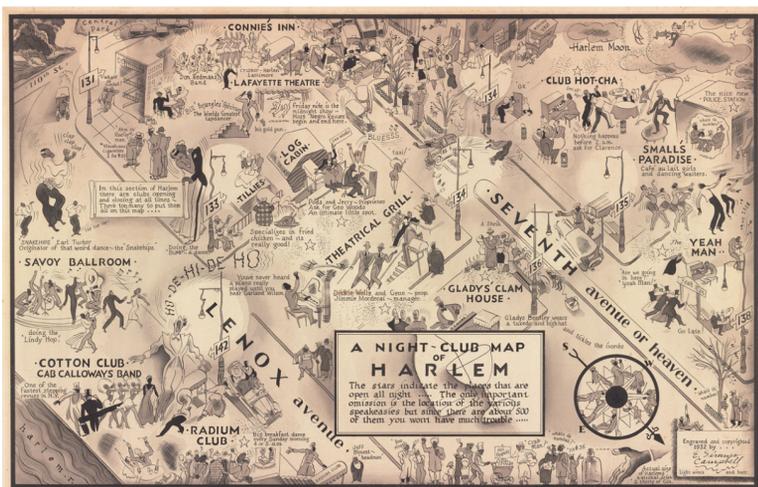
Campbell made national headlines in 1936 when he won a \$1000 prize in an editorial cartoon contest sponsored by William Randolph Hearst's newspapers (below, center). Tellingly, Hearst's own flagship paper, *The San Francisco Examiner*, did not disclose (as many other papers did) that Campbell was African-American. In 1957 Campbell moved to Switzerland (where he, a huge jazz fan, spent time with touring musicians like Dizzy Gillespie and Cab Calloway), remaining there until 1970, when he returned to White Plains, New York, and died the following year.



*Esquire*, Oct. 1934, featuring *Esqy*, the magazine's mascot created by Campbell.



E. Simms Campbell, *Renaissance Barber Shop*. Watercolor illustration.



E. Simms Campbell, *A Night-Club Map of Harlem*, 1932.



*The Tax-Grabber*, prize-winning editorial cartoon by E. Simms Campbell, 1936. *San Francisco Examiner*, Jan. 26, 1936.



The ever-ogling *Esqy*, in figurine form.