

# Thurgood Marshall

Name:	<b>Thurgood Marshall Elementary School</b>	Enrollment:	337
Address:	2401 S Irving Street	Nickname:	none
Configuration:	K-5	Colors:	Purple and white



Thurgood Marshall, 2000 ©Mary Randlett SPSA 212-50

The school that is now Thurgood Marshall originated at the turn of the century when immigrants coming to Seattle settled in the Rainier Valley. From 1891, the Rainier Valley community was linked to downtown by an electric railway. With the demolition of South School in the Jackson Street Regrade project in 1909, the Seattle School Board authorized purchase of a tract of land to the east at Atlantic Street and 24th Avenue S for a new school.

The new “fireproof” school followed the nine-room “model school” design of the time but was T-shaped with the addition of an eight-room wing at one end, and nearly identical to Adams. Done in the Jacobean style, the new Rainier Valley school was named for James M. Colman, a Seattle engineer who helped develop the waterfront and completed the railroad that carried coal from Newcastle and Renton. Colman was a native of Scotland who came to Seattle in 1869.

Colman School opened to 519 pupils in grades 1–7 for its first year. By 1913–14, the school enrolled 626 students in K–8. The second principal, Anna B. Kane, served the school from 1912 until 1940, one of the longest terms of any principal in the district. Special classes for the handicapped were added in 1925. In 1934–35, enrollment dipped under 400. In September 1939, when it became a K–6 school, enrollment dropped to 230.



Colman, 1909 MOHAI 83.10.8539

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Name: **Colman School**  
 Location: 1515 24th Avenue S  
 Building: 17-room, 3-story brick  
 Architect: James Stephen  
 Site: 2.2 acres

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1909: Named on April 17  
 1910: Opened on January 24  
 1918: Renamed *J.M. Colman School* on January 29  
 1940: Addition (Naramore & Brady)  
 1944-48: Site expanded to 6.2 acres  
 1979: Closed as elementary school in June  
 1979-85: Alternative school site  
 1985-: Occupied by community activists

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In 1940, an addition was made to the Colman building, attaching an auditorium-gymnasium to the southeast corner. This allowed for the closing of Rainier School whose 200 pupils came to Colman. Property to the east of Colman was purchased in 1944, 1945, and 1948 to expand the play area, and the city vacated 24th Avenue S, allowing a direct connection between the school and its new play space.

During World War II, the Stadium Federal Housing Project was constructed in the Colman neighborhood. Five temporary classrooms were added in summer 1943 when the school's population rose to 550.

In the late 1960s, the state highway department began purchasing homes in the immediate neighborhood of the school as a right-of-way for the new interstate highway, I-90. Houses to the north were demolished and the school became isolated from its surroundings. During this period, voluntary desegregation was launched, and Colman, with a predominantly African-American student body, bused over 250 students to schools in the northern part of the city. From 1968 to 1973, a federal grant brought Teachers Corps interns to assist in the classrooms for half-days.

In 1978-79, Colman became part of a triad with Green Lake and Ravenna. Colman served the K-2 students and emphasized the DISTAR method of teaching in a successful effort to improve academic test scores. DISTAR stands for "Direct Instruction Strategies for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading." The program, which has been available at other schools in the district, is designed to provide students with a firm founda-



Colman, ca. 1940 SPSA 212-45

tion in basic academic skills, such as reading, mathematics, and language.

Because of impending highway construction, the future of Colman became increasingly uncertain. Colman closed as an elementary school in June 1979. Under the terms of a 1972 agreement, the state highway commission was to provide the Seattle School District with land and funding for a new school at a new location. From 1979–1985, Summit K–12 alternative school was located in the building. In 1984–85, Summit K–12 had 387 students (205 in elementary level, 82 in middle school, and 100 in high school). Highway construction eventually led to Summit’s move to Jane Addams in September 1985.

In late November 1985, a group of African-American activists occupied the abandoned Colman building, with visions of turning it into the African-American Heritage Museum and Cultural Center. For over a decade, two groups have attempted to turn this dream into a reality, but a series of disagreements has led to near abandonment of the museum plan.

Although many parents wanted to keep Colman’s student body intact during this interim period, the district initially transferred them to other area schools. In 1989, Colman pupils reassembled in a temporary site at Seward to await the opening of their new school.

A formal agreement with the state for funding a new school came in 1987, allowing the district to proceed with the design and planning process. Construction began in September 1990 on a two-story building with a detached single-story childcare facility. The site is situated adjacent to the lid that covers the I-90 tunnel, occupying a narrow strip of property along the residential neighborhood.

In December 1990, the district decided to have a new African



Colman, 1960 SPSA 212-43

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Name: **J.M. Colman Elementary School**

Location: 2401 S Irving Street

Building: Steel frame with brick veneer exterior

Architect: Mahlum & Nordfors

Site: 7.4 acres

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1991: Opened in September

1996: Renamed *Thurgood Marshall Elementary*

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American Academy share the new Colman School building for one year and then move to another location.

The new facility contains 16 regular classrooms, two kindergartens, two resource rooms, one art/science room, and five classrooms for handicapped students. The playground has both a paved area and adjacent grass field and is located on top of the I-90 lid. In 1996, the school was renamed Thurgood Marshall Elementary in honor of the nation's first African-American Supreme Court justice who fought successfully for desegregation of public schools. Several awards have been bestowed on the new school, including *Redbook* magazine's "Overall Excellence" and the National Alliance of Black School Educators recognition for commitment to quality education.

The school serves a student population that is over 70 percent minority, with African-American pupils comprising most of that group. Students are required to wear uniforms.