



seattlepi.com

NWclas N Su Cont Seattle Post-

Jump to [Weather](#) | [Traffic](#) | [Mariners](#) | [Seahawks](#) | [Sonics](#) | [Forums](#) | [Calendar](#)

SEARCH></t

Archives

- NEWS
- [Local](#)
- [Neighborhoods](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Nation/World](#)
- [Business](#)
- [A&E](#)
- [Lifestyle](#)
- [NW Outdoors](#)
- [Photos/Reprints](#)
- [Special Reports](#)

- COMMENTARY
- [Opinion](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Letters](#)
- [David Horsey](#)
- [Saturday Spin](#)
- [Forums](#)

- WHAT'S HAPPENING
- [Calendar](#)
- [Movie Times](#)
- [Restaurants](#)
- [SeattleNoise](#)

- COFFEE BREAK
- [Comics & Games](#)
- [Horoscope](#)
- [TV Listings](#)

- P-I ANYWHERE
- [E-mail](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [News Alerts](#)
- [RSS/Web feeds](#)
- [PDA](#)
- [Cell Phones](#)

- MARKETPLACE
- [Jobs](#)
- [Autos](#)
- [Homes](#)
- [Rentals](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [NWsource](#)
- [Shopping](#)
- [Personals](#)
- [Place an ad](#)

MARKETPLACE

[Jobs](#) | [Autos](#) | [Shopping](#)

[Homes](#) | [Rentals](#) | [Post an ad](#)

WE'LL NEVER GIVE UP, SAY ACTIVISTS AT COLMAN SCHOOL

By John O'Ryan P-I Reporter

WEDNESDAY, February 19, 1986

Section: News, Page: D1

Colman School has no heat, no lights, no hot water and very little furniture, but there still is lots of dedication in the old building.

About a dozen activists who have occupied the building since last November in hopes of turning it into an Afro-American heritage museum vow there is not the tiniest chance they will give up. They say - like Martin Luther King Jr. - that they "have a dream."

The temperature was 55 degrees yesterday in the teachers' lounge that serves as their "command post," although that room is heated by a kerosene stove. Throughout the remainder of the building, it was frigid.

The activists entered the vacant school building Nov. 25 through a rear window, and they have maintained their occupation since that date.

"It's shameful that we have to live this way, in this cold, to achieve a goal that would be beneficial to every citizen of Seattle," said Omari Tahir, a former schoolteacher who operates a contracting business.

The four-story school building, at 1515-24th Ave. S., was closed and boarded up last summer by the Seattle School District, and was scheduled to be sold to the Department of Transportation to use as offices for the nearby I-90 construction project. Beyond that, the school is expected to be demolished or deeded to the city.

The group's takeover of the school wasn't exactly a spur-of-the-moment operation, because members of the group had been working for six years to achieve an Afro-American heritage museum.

"There was a report recently that 80 percent of black students in public schools were getting failing grades," said Tahir. "The problem is that black schoolchildren lack pride in themselves. They know little about their heritage, or about the significant contributions black people have made to the American society."

The museum would have art and historical sections, and "it would be a living museum, presenting such things as Afro-American drama, dance



and music," said Earl Debnam, who works in real estate and occupies the school.

Tahir and Charlie James, who operates a communications service, conducted a tour of the building from the big basement with a spacious gymnasium to the attic level with a roof that isn't leaking.

"The building is solid and basically in good shape," said James. "It could be converted into a museum for 20 cents on the dollar of what it would cost to build a new museum."

And all of them are proud of the big mural in the gymnasium that depicts black people in relation to other people all over the globe.

James dug into a pile of documents and brought out sheets containing signatures of support from more than 400 citizens, and other sheets containing the signatures of 40 neighbors of the school, all approving the museum project. "Our Citizens Support Group has 200 very active members and at least 3,000 supporting members," he said.

But they have little money. They buy gasoline for a small generator they have installed on the roof to provide a little electricity, and kerosene for their stove, mainly with small donations.

"All we need is some real support from the mayor and about \$250,000 seed money to set up an operation. We could raise, from public, corporate and private sources, the two or three million we need to complete the museum," said James.

Police visit and sometimes knock on the door to inquire how things are going, said Debnam.

Does the group intend to give up?

"Never!" said Debnam. "We are going to win this one, for all of us!"

This article contained at least one photo or illustration as described below:

Type: PHOTO

Description: GILBERT ARIAS/P-I PHOTO -- Omari Tahir and the other activists occupying the old Colman School are proud of the large mural in the gymnasium that depicts black people in relation to other people all over the globe.

[Home](#) | [Archives](#) | [Corrections](#) | [Front Page](#) | [About the P-I](#) | [P-I Jobs](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Home Delivery](#)

 Seattle Post-Intelligencer

101 Elliott Ave. W.
Seattle, WA 98119
(206) 448-8000

Home Delivery: (206) 464-2121 or (800) 542-0820

Send comments to newmedia@seattlepi.com
©1996-2006 Seattle Post-Intelligencer
[Terms of Service/Privacy Policy](#)

[Customize
your
content](#)
[Customize
your
content](#)

OUR
AFFILIATES

 [NWsource](#)

 [K](#)

 [N](#)

Pmail also available by e-mail

RSS also available by RSS

RSS

AP: TOP HEADLINES

- [Sharon in critical condition after surgery](#)
- [Al-Jaafari named to head Iraq's new gov't](#)
- [Rice: Nations must not incite protests](#)
- [Iran reaffirms nuclear treaty commitment](#)
- [Agents probe another Ala. church fire](#)

* [more](#)

RSS

MOST READ

- [A Microsoft iPod rival? Gates weighs in](#)
- [Injured Kwan bows out of Turin competition](#)
- [Attorney dies 15 months after shooting by rival](#)
- [People in the News: Boorish Beate and a squeamish Sly](#)
- [Huskies outlast UCLA, 70-67](#)

* [more](#)

RSS

MOST PRINTED

- [Russian leaders reach out to rogue regimes](#)
- [A Microsoft iPod rival? Gates weighs in](#)
- [Sheik depicted as a danger](#)
- ['Singer' totally, like, skewers the '80s](#)
- [Oh, the places your luggage will go](#)

* [more](#)

RSS

MOST E-MAILED

- [Oh, the places your luggage will go](#)
- [Senate passes measure banning bestiality](#)
- [There are bargains in real estate](#)
- [Bellissimo! From Pavarotti to Loren, a great start](#)
- [Sheik depicted as a danger](#)

* [more](#)

POPULAR SOUNDOFFS

- [Sound Off: Do you think the Super Bowl was fairly officiated?](#)
- [Not showing drawings responsible choice](#)
- [Warrantless Wiretaps: Ducking questions](#)
- [Should religion trump free speech?](#)
- [Freedom of speech under attack](#)

* [more](#)

* [help/troubleshoot](#)

* [customize your content](#)

* [disable myPI](#)

* [your account](#) * [customize your content](#)

* [disable myPI](#)

* [your account](#)