

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received JUN 29 1987  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Central High School

and/or common La Central, also La Central High

**2. Location**

street & number Ponce de León Avenue \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Santurce \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of San Juan

state Puerto Rico code PR county San Juan code 127

**3. Classification**

| Category  | Ownership                                  | Status  | Present Use                                     |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied          | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture            | <input type="checkbox"/> museum            |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> private           | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied                   | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial             | <input type="checkbox"/> park              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure              | <input type="checkbox"/> both              | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational | <input type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site                   | <b>Public Acquisition</b>                  | <b>Accessible</b>                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment          | <input type="checkbox"/> religious         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object                 | <input type="checkbox"/> in process        | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted              | <input type="checkbox"/> government             | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific        |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial             | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation    |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> no                           | <input type="checkbox"/> military               | <input type="checkbox"/> other:            |

**4. Owner of Property**

name Department of Education - Departamento de Instrucción Pública

street & number Urbanización Industrial Tres Monjitas

city, town Hato Rey \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of San Juan state Puerto Rico

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. San Juan Registry of Deeds

street & number Muñoz Rivera Avenue

city, town Hato Rey \_\_\_\_\_ state Puerto Rico

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Early XXth C. High Schools in Puerto Rico has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date October, 1986 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office

city, town San Juan \_\_\_\_\_ state Puerto Rico

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Central High School's 1925 U-shaped three story concrete building sits at the heart of Santurce, opening up towards Ponce de León Avenue, the area's (or for that matter, the capital's) main thoroughfare. The structure in one of several institutional buildings dating from the 20's and the 30's, (many of them schools), that line up against the avenue, granting a formal, ceremonial character to the latter, unequalled in the rest of the Island.

Elevated and considerably set back from the street, the prominence of the school on its site is further underlined by the stepped promenade that leads the spectator from the sidewalk to the building. Symmetrically located flagpoles and 2 secondary entrances are main features at the open ended side of the U-shaped trapezoidal plan, through which one reaches the main entrance portico. A green area with trees makes an effective transition between the busy city life and the more peaceful academic environment. The length, height and controlled proportions of the structure grant their open ended open space, the space defining qualities of a courtyard... and yet it isn't one.

The profusely decorated portico, with six monumental columns, topped by a continuously receding/projecting entablature leads the visitor to a rectangular lobby whose longitudinal axis runs parallel to the facade and ultimately leads, at both ends, to the main stairs. Secondary stairs are located at the end of the double loaded corridors on each lateral wing of the building. Behind the lobby space, gymnasium and auditorium (both 2 stories) are located. They are reached via the main stairs, at different landing levels. The gymnasium's austere lines exult functionality. The space accommodates a regular size basketball court, with raised bleachers at both sides. At the auditorium, however, ornament is pursued as a device for expressing the academic and cultural aspirations of such a hall. The wide proscenium arch, in spite of framing a shallow stage, is generous in providing corinthian pilasters, cornices and moulding, festoons, pinnacles and an escutcheon. The ceiling is articulated in accordance with the lay out of supporting structural beams, its flat surfaces shaping into "Catalonian" vaults as the side walls are approached. The original lamps, in cast iron and translucent glass are still hanging; all in all most evocative and highly similar to school facilities of this type being built in the states of the same time. The shallow U-shaped mezzanine incorporated a projection booth still standing. As the rest of the hall, the mezzanine is today devoid of its original theatre type seating.

Here, the use of classical vocabulary, both inside and outside, is more eclectic than academic in nature. Central High is inspired on the Spanish Mediterranean revival so much in vogue in California and Florida at the time, so the use of the neoclassical elements was indulged upon free handedly.

Decoration thus seems much more applied than integrated to the wall: bizarre, mannerist effects were pursued. The crowning of the entrance portico best exemplifies this. The two identical second story frontispieces with balconies overlooking Ponce de León Avenue, stand out as features independent of the surface wall behind them. Inside, detailing is handled similarly. Among the most prominent Spanish Revival details one could list: the red clay tile on the roof, arches and their use in pairs and of 3, french windows, columns of moorish derivation, iron railings, and many others. Horizontal mouldings modulate height & unify the total volume.

## 8. Significance

| Period                                    | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below    |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric      | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric  | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning     | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499        | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic     | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation           | <input type="checkbox"/> law                    | <input type="checkbox"/> science                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599        | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> economics              | <input type="checkbox"/> literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education              | <input type="checkbox"/> military               | <input type="checkbox"/> social/<br>humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799        | <input type="checkbox"/> art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> music                  | <input type="checkbox"/> theater                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899        | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy             | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900– | <input type="checkbox"/> communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government    | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)         |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> invention              |   |  |

**Specific dates** 1925 **Builder/Architect** Adrian C. Finlayson

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Central High School is, for many reasons, the most important school structure built in Puerto Rico in the first decades of the XXth century. Of the over 3000 schools built in Puerto Rico during that period, only a few boast an auditorium like that of Central High, but certainly none has a better or large one. Central's seats 1300. Being the largest school serving the capital's population, it was the only three-stories public educational structure ever made. And the architectural detailing, both exterior and interior, was much taken care of. In that sense, this building is the one on the Island that best represents the United States early XXth century ideas on education and educational facilities.

Central High closely resembles the schools proposed and erected by the so-called "school specialists" of the time, primarily architects such as Haussander and Perkins of Chicago, Snyder of New York, Cooper of Boston and, especially, William B. Ittner, of St. Louis. Their work and ideas was widely publicized in trade magazines that were locally accessible, like "American Architect", "Architectural Record", and others.

The architect for Central High was Adrian C. Finlayson, at the time working for the Insular Government's interior department. He designed some of the most important school structures in the Island: Labra High School, Baldorioty de Castro School, Rafael Cordero School in Santurce, and many others of equivalent relevance. As such, Mr. Finlayson is a key figure on our Island's architectural development.

Central High's use of the Spanish Renaissance Style makes of it an important landmark, given the style's subsequent proliferation on the Island, its impact on architectural vocabulary on all areas of building, and the contemporary interest on the style's manifestations, origins and possibilities. The school's impressive siting in Santurce is unique, and acknowledged as such by everybody. So has been the school's academic profile within the community, and not just in urban terms. Many well-known public figures have graduated from Central; today it houses a visual arts-oriented secondary school program. The public recognition of its academic achievements has been as distinguished as its hierarchical role within the urban texture of Santurce. During the past years a victim of gentrification, Santurce is again showing signs (and getting help) for its economic revitalization, thus reaffirming its role as a public and civic stronghold.

Central High School has always been, and continues to be, a key element of significant historical, urban, architectural and academic value in Puerto Rico's history.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Archivo General de Puerto Rico  
Fondo de Obras Públicas, Exp. 1, 2 Leg. 62 caja 1053  
Leg. 62-A Caja 1054

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name USGS San Juan 1969

Quadrangle scale 1 : 20,000

UTM References

A 

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| Zone |   |   | Easting |   |   |   | Northing |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

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Verbal boundary description and justification

see enclosed location plan

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jorge Rigau, AIA Secretary

organization Colación, Inc. date March 16, 1987

street & number Ponce de León 653, Miramar telephone (809) 725-3948

city or town San Juan state Puerto Rico

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Mariano G. Coronas Castro

title State Historic Preservation Officer date June 17, 1987

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Army Schlager date Aug 4, 1987  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet Central High School

Item number

Page 1

Classrooms are well-lit and ventilated openings are many. Wall are plain; floors in hardwood, terrazo and quarry tile, concrete, but not the original ones. Central High School was in 1983 the subject of a yet unfinished restoration which improved on many changes and alterations undertaken throughout the years. Too many aluminium louvered windows still remain . However, in spite of it all, and probably because of the school's imposing scale and profuse architectural detail, the integrity has not yet been lost. The recent restoration helped, but should be both corrected and completed.

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SCALE 1:1,000

