



Major Taylor Mural

Life is too short for any man to hold bitterness in his heart
and that is why I have no feeling against anybody.
Marshall Taylor



Marshall 'Major' Taylor lived the first 17 years of his life in Indianapolis. From the age of 8 until he was 12, he lived with the Southards, a white family who bought him his first bicycle. At a time when only the well to do could afford a pedal machine, Marshall began to develop the stunts that soon earned him employment at a local bike shop. And where he would earn the nickname, 'Major', because he did them while wearing a military uniform.

After winning a ten-mile amateur bike racing event in 1890 at the age of 12, Birdie Munger, a former HiWheel bike racer, took him under his wing. He paid the teenager to go to area high schools and colleges to teach people how to ride a bike and promote his line of racing bicycles. Committed to turning Taylor into a bike racing champion, a strong bond formed,

In grooming him for this distinction, it wasn't long before Taylor was feared by the local bike racers. They used the local sporting bodies to make it hard for him to compete. They attacked him with hatred.

In 1896, Munger moved Taylor and his bike business to the state of Massachusetts where there was more tolerance for a black bicycle racer. Taylor became a pro that year. And yet sadly, Munger's Worcester Cycle Manufacturing Company went into receivership in the year that followed.



Racing for others sponsors who Munger then helped him to get, Taylor won race after race. Known as the "Worcester Whirlwind," the "Black Cyclone," the "Ebony Flyer," even the "Colored Cyclone," Taylor's legend grew. In 1899, at a velodrome in Montreal, Canada, he became the first black American to win a cycling world championship.

His victories in 1899 included twenty-two first-place finishes in major championship races all around the U.S. The range and variety of his winning performances, made him an

international celebrity. Here in the States, one of his fans was President [Theodore Roosevelt](#) who kept track of Taylor throughout his seventeen-year racing career. Taylor was so successful, that in 1900, he was able to buy a home in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Despite his prowess on two-wheels here in America, some of his fellow racers refused to compete with him, others resorted to intimidation, verbal insults, and threats to physically harm him. In Europe, however, he was a sensation. There he was so popular among the European race fans and news reporters that everywhere he went he was mobbed, talked about, or written up. In 1901, Taylor won 18 of the 24 European races he entered. He also competed in Australia and New Zealand in 1903 and 1904

Taylor's last professional race took place in France in 1909. He won and retired from competitive cycling at age 32. By this time, his estimated net worth was thought to be as high as \$100,000 (\$3,063,076 in 2022 dollars).



In his retirement, for the next 18 years, he invested his money in different business ventures. Then, he invested in himself by self-publishing his autobiography, "The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World: The Story of a Colored Boy's Indomitable Courage and Success Against Great Odds: An Autobiography."

It came out in 1928 at a time when only a few large publishing

houses had the resources needed to produce books. The next year the stock market crashed. As the economy nose dived all around him, he was forced to sell his home of 30 years along with most of his possessions. After then moving to a suburb near Chicago, he died penniless of a heart attack in 1932.

Interred in an unmarked pauper's grave, his body was exhumed in 1948 and reburied by a group led by the owner of Schwinn Bicycle. The plaque at his grave reads:

"World's champion bicycle racer who came up the hard way without hatred in his heart, an honest, courageous and God-fearing, clean-living gentlemanly athlete. A credit to his race who always gave out his best. Gone but not forgotten."