

# THE LONG ROAD OF BLACK AMERICANS IN CYCLING

Cycling has been popularized since the 1890s in the United States both for leisure and for sport. Cycling was originally a segregated sport, and Black Americans still struggle to be highlighted on the cycling stage.

## 1899 - A NEW BICYCLE FRAME

In 1899, African American inventor Isaac Johnson put in a patent for a new folding bicycle frame. Folding bicycles had been invented in the 1880s, but Johnson's design was special; its frame came in a diamond pattern, which almost all 21st-century bikes follow today.



## 1896 - 25TH INFANTRY BICYCLE BRIGADE

When bicycles grew popular, the military wanted to know if bikes were a viable combat vehicle. They took a unit of 26 Black soldiers, including a medic and officers, and set out on a trip from Montana to Missouri. They faced harsh conditions and, although their trip was successful, bikes were considered a non-viable combat option due to time and weather restraints.

## 1899 - MARSHALL "MAJOR" TAYLOR

Born and raised in Indianapolis, Major Taylor was the second African American world champion in any sport. He set records as world cycling champion in 1899 and sprint champion in 1900. Taylor's racing was often openly discouraged by white peers, and some track owners outright banned him from their tracks. Despite this, he raced successfully throughout the US, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

## WHITE HOSTILITY AGAINST TAYLOR

In the Jim Crow era, Black-only racing clubs were common. Taylor was faced with open hostility at times when attempting to compete in all races - ice water was thrown in his face during one race, and an opponent attacked him after a race and choked him into unconsciousness (the attacker only faced only a \$50 fine). When he bought a house in Worcester, MA, his white neighbors attempted to purchase it back from him, but he refused.



## 1988 - NELSON VAILS

From New York, Nelson Vails competed in the 1984 Summer Olympics representing the USA. He won the silver medal in the sprint. He was the first - and so far the only - African American cyclist to win an Olympic medal. Before the Olympics, he won a gold medal in the Pan American games. Following the Olympics, he also raced in Europe and won 3 national tandem sprints following his Olympic career.

## VAILS' CULTURAL IMPACT

Nelson Vails actually makes an appearance in the film "Quicksilver" as a New York bicycle messenger - which also happened to be one of his occupations! He was inducted into the US Bicycle Hall of Fame in 2009.



## 2020- AYESHA MCGOWAN

Growing up near Atlanta, Georgia, Ayesha McGowan is the first-ever African American female professional cyclist. She was awarded the Kiltie Knox award in 2020 by the League of American Bicyclists for being a champion of diversity and inclusion. Working a day job as a music teacher, she took up racing in 2014 and has raced ever since.

## MCGOWAN'S TEAM

McGowan is sponsored by Liv Cycling, which is the only global all-women sanctioned team, an official partner of Enduro World Series, and a member of Cycling USA.



## 2021 - ST AUGUSTINE'S UNIVERSITY CYCLING TEAM

A historically Black college and university (HBCU) located in Raleigh, North Carolina, the St Augustine's University Cycling Team is registered with USA Cycling. Founded in April of 2020, it plans to compete in the Atlanta Collegiate Cycling Conference (also known as the ACCC) against other universities throughout the Southeastern US. The team is led by Caribbean and African American captains, and comprised of students from across the diaspora contributing to Black American history.

