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A fitting tribute

Grant puts Major Taylor fundraising over top

The campaign to erect a statue in Worcester commemorating champion cyclist Marshall W. "Major" Taylor has received a major — and decisive — boost from Beacon Hill.

A formidable professional cyclist, Major Taylor moved from his native Indiana to Worcester as a young man in 1895 and lived here most of his life. He set seven world records in 1898 and won the world cycling championship in 1899.

In Worcester he found a comparatively accepting haven. Still, as a black athlete a half-century before Jackie Robinson broke baseball's racial barrier, he frequently encountered overt prejudice from competitors and spectators alike. Cycling made him wealthy, but once out of the spotlight his fortunes dimmed and he died in obscurity and poverty.

Selection of a design and fundraising that has netted more than \$70,000 have been coordinated by a volunteer organization. A \$205,000 grant shepherded through the Legislature by the local delegation and signed by the governor puts the drive over its \$250,000 goal. The monument, designed by sculptor Antonio Tobias Mendez, will be at the main branch of the Worcester Public Library.

The commemoration is a fitting tribute. The Major Taylor saga is both an inspiring story of great skill, determination and courage in the face of adversity and a bittersweet saga that illuminates an era in the history of our state and nation that too often is forgotten.