

Maryland NAACP leader blasts Gov. Larry Hogan's posthumous pardons of lynching victims as 'political posturing'

By [Chandelis Duster](#), CNN

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Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, far right, Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski and Maryland House Speaker Adrienne Jones stand next to a new historic marker on Saturday in Towson, Maryland, that memorializes Howard Cooper, a 15-year-old who was dragged from a jailhouse and hanged from a tree by a mob of white men in 1885. Hogan signed a posthumous pardon for 34 men, including Cooper, who were lynched in the state between 1854 and 1933 without due process against allegations they faced.

(CNN) — The head of Maryland's NAACP on Sunday lambasted Gov. Larry Hogan's posthumous pardon of lynching victims as "political posturing," criticizing the Republican governor for issuing a blanket pardon of dozens of the state's Black victims even though many were never convicted of any crimes, but merely charged or accused of wrongdoing before they were killed.

The scathing criticism comes after Hogan on Saturday [issued the blanket pardons](#) for Howard Cooper, a 15-year-old Black child who was hanged from a sycamore tree after he was convicted of raping and assaulting a White woman, and 33 other victims of racial lynching in Maryland between 1854 and 1933.

According to a historical marker erected during [Saturday's news conference](#), Cooper faced an all-White jury, which reached a guilty verdict in under a minute despite the fact the victim did not testify she was raped. Cooper was killed before his attorneys had an opportunity to appeal to the Supreme Court.

The criticism also comes amid a racial reckoning stemming from recent deaths of Americans of color at the hands of police, reigniting a discussion around the country's racist past that included lynching, violent and horrific

Willie Flowers, president of the NAACP Maryland State Conference, questioned the authenticity of Hogan's posthumous pardons of lynching victims, including for many who were never convicted of crimes and were just charged or alleged to have committed crimes.

"This is just political posturing that nobody needs right now," Flowers told CNN on Sunday. "If the governor's going to do something, he should with his power as governor look at the many broken systems based on the same type of vitriol, contempt, hatred, that caused the murders of these gentlemen. Every system that has been broken, as the governor of Maryland, he alone can change all of it."

He continued, "Celebrating himself by reminding people that lynchings happened is not the best thing you can do, it's actually the least that he could do."

Flowers also questioned the motives behind Hogan's announcement. Some have suggested the term-limited Maryland governor could emerge as a GOP leader on the political stage for national office.

A spokesperson for Hogan did not respond to Flowers' claims.

The Maryland Lynching Memorial Project and students at Loch Raven Technical Academy in Towson requested a pardon for Cooper, and Hogan said Saturday after studying Cooper's case, it led him to review all the cases of lynchings in the state during that time.

"The State of Maryland has long been on the forefront of civil rights, dating back to Justice Thurgood Marshall's legal battle to integrate the schools and our national reckoning on race," he said at an event dedicating a memorial to Cooper. "Today, we are once again leading the way, as together, we continue the work to build a more perfect union. ... My hope is that this action will at least in some way help to right these horrific wrongs and perhaps to bring a measure of peace to the memories of these individuals, and to their descendants and their loved ones."

Asked how other victims were selected for a pardon, the legal criteria for each case and the review process for the pardons, Michael Ricci, communications director for Hogan, told CNN each case "met the standard that it was an extrajudicial killing that violated rights to due process and equal protection of law."

"The Office of Legal Counsel reviewed the available documentation, including the information submitted by the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project," Ricci wrote in an email Sunday.

CNN reached out to Stacey Johnson, principal of Loch Raven Technical Academy, for comment Sunday.

Others on social media also criticized the governor's actions, including Marlena Jareaux, a founder of the Howard County Lynching Truth & Reconciliation group, who addressed the governor in a [tweet](#) on Saturday for using the name "Jacob Henson," an incorrect name of one of the lynching victims issued a posthumous pardon.

"Dear @GovLarryHogan (.) When doing a pardon, you might check with the people doing the history and work (us) for HoCo, so you pardon the CORRECT person! You pardoned Jacob's dad. It's "Jacob Henson, Jr." Descendant could have told you also, had someone asked," Jareaux wrote.

Research of reporting of the lynching at the time [published by The Herald and Torch Light](#) found by CNN, shows that Jacob Henson, Jr. was dragged by a mob from Ellicott City jail and hanged on May 28, 1895. He was convicted of killing his employer Daniel Shea, a White shopkeeper, after he reportedly confessed to doing so as an act of self-defense.

After Henson was convicted, his attorney told the court he planned to file an appeal for clemency to the governor stating Henson was not of sound mind, according to a [biography in the Maryland State Archives](#). Prior to the governor's decision, a mob pulled Henson from jail and he was hanged.

According to [research](#) by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), many lynching victims were "murdered without being accused of any crime; they were killed for minor social transgressions or for demanding basic rights and fair treatment." EJI also notes that many Black Americans were also lynched not because they committed a crime or

Nearly 6,500 documented racial terror lynchings occurred in the US between 1865 and 1950, according to [EJI](#).

Flowers said years ago families wanted to know that their relatives were innocent when they were chased down and murdered because it "released the shame of them being crooks, and they were probably crooks for other things," but added this was not the case with these posthumous pardons.

"These individuals, like most victims of lynching, were never crooks. They were just targets and victims of lynch mobs and that's what he (Hogan) can't articulate," Flowers said.

 

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