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Linda Epps
President and CEO
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MS. EPPS: Good morning everyone. First I'd like to ask all the testifiers to please move up front in the first row if you're here.

So good morning. I'm Linda Epps, President and CEO of the New Jersey Historical Society. To our old friends who are here often, welcome on this cold, blustery Saturday morning, and to new friends, if this is your first visit, I express an especially warm welcome to you and hope that this visit will not be your last.

First and foremost, if you don't have time today, I hope that you will come back and take time to visit our exhibit on the second floor of this building called What's Going On, Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties, which chronicles this city's events from the turn of the century, turn of the 20th Century that is, up to the present day with the emphasis on 1967 and the rebellion that took place here in Newark.

Most people think that we call that exhibit What's Going On in honor of Marvin Gaye's hit tune of that same title. I'd like to clarify that that's not really it. The exhibit is based on over 100 oral histories done by Rutgers' sociologist Max Herman, and, as you know, there's been a controversy on how to define the events of 1967. Was it a riot? Was it a rebellion? Was it a civil disturbance?

And we were listening over and over again. The one thing that seemed to be sure, very clear, and we were hearing these exact words over and over in the testimonies, is no one could understand exactly what was going on during that time period. Hence, the title.

We started listening to Marvin Gaye and found out that it was appropriate that way, but that was done in 1971. After looking back to the records, some of you have read Michael Dyson's book Mercy, Mercy Me, and we found that Marvin actually penned that tune in '67 and '68. Barry was too afraid to publish it because he felt that it was too controversial, but it was really describing the tenure of the times.

No one knew what was going on during that time period, which is exactly why Lyndon Johnson in 1967 organized the Kerner Commission and that's why we're gathered here this morning.

And I dare say that things are going on in urban areas today. We're still trying to figure out what was going on precisely because I think we will hear that many of us not did pay as close attention to what that Kerner Commission Report said. Let's hope that this second time around we get it a little bit better. We get a little bit closer to it.

So I'd like to welcome you here this morning. I know that we're in for a provocative and insightful morning.

I would like to remind you to turn off all cell phones and beepers. We are being recorded here today.

And, once again, because I saw some of our other testifiers come in the room, if I can ask you to move forward, please, and sit in these first two rows, it would be very helpful. I know I saw you come in. I don't want to name names, Komozi.

And I would just like to end with a few words from the Harlem renaissance poet laureate, Langston Hughes, who said, Oh, yes, I see it plain, America never was America to me, and yet I swear this oath, America will be.

So let's hope that within this next 40 years America will be what it should be, what it was formed to be for the many disenfranchised people of our city.