

Good evening and welcome everyone. You can really feel the energy in this place, can't you? It's so exciting to be here with all of you tonight in this historic Vilna Shul.

My name is Rabbi Marc Baker, I'm the President and CEO of Combined Jewish Philanthropies.

Before we begin, I just want to give a couple of shout-outs, and I'm sure there'll be lots more tonight.

First of all, to Dalit and Laura and the entire Vilna team and everyone who made this happen, thank you.

And to Amari Paris-Jeffries and the entire Embrace team, thank you for this amazing initiative.

There is something so meaningful and so powerful about being together in a place like this — surrounded by history, by memory, and by community — not just to reflect on where we've been, but to ask who we aspire to become.

And I have to say, and I'm sure I don't need to tell all of you this, I cannot remember a time when our communities — and our democracy — have felt more

fragile than they do right now. Which means that the medium is the message tonight.

At a time of such division and toxic, dare I say dangerous, polarization, simply choosing to come together — across institutions, across differences — is an act of social and spiritual resistance, and it gives me hope for a more vibrant future.

Tonight is also about partnership.

This marker, and this moment, are the result of the collaboration between Embrace Boston, the Vilna Shul, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies, and I want to give a special shout out to my colleagues at our Center for Combating Antisemitism, who continue to emphasize relationships and education are the heart of everything we do. Thank you.

And through this partnership, we're helping to tell an inclusive story, the *whole* story of our city — and our country — a story that no one community can tell alone.

Ours is a story we must tell and a future we must build together.

As we approach the anniversary of 250 years of American independence, that responsibility to feels especially poignant right now.

Because anniversaries like this one are not just about looking backward: they ask us to reflect on the kind of country we want to be.

They also raise enduring questions for us to consider, like:

- Whose stories are we telling?
- Whose stories have we overlooked?
- And what does it mean to build a society where everyone can see themselves in our collective story?

Our democracy depends on how we think about and answer these questions.

And that's why tonight, and this marker, matter so much.

When Jewish history and identity — when anyone's history and identity — become invisible, overlooked, or, worse, erased, our feelings of belonging as Americans weaken.

And when people's sense of belonging is fragile, division grows, animosity festers, and we all know what happens next.

This is something that the Jewish community understands to well.

I cannot think of a better place to celebrate the story of Boston's Jews then right here at the Vilna Shul.

More than 100 years ago, groups of Jewish immigrants arrived in Boston seeking opportunity, dignity, and a new beginning.

And they didn't start with buildings.

They started by showing up for one another — gathering in homes, forming networks of mutual support, and building community from the ground up.

That is, by the way, I would say the operating system of the Jewish People for the past few thousand years.

Eventually they built physical spaces like this one — which isn't just a place to worship, it was a center of Jewish life. A place to gather, to celebrate, to care for one another. A model of community rooted in belonging and shared responsibility, and right here in

the heart of downtown Boston, where Jews would become essential parts of the fabric of civic life.

That is what this partnership represents. It's what Everyone250 is all about. A chance to celebrate our history and recommit to our shared future.

So tonight, as we unveil this marker, let's remember that we are not just the inheritors of this story, the story of this country, the story of this city. We are writing its next chapters, together.

Thank you.