Universe of Obligation

Democracy is becoming rather than being. It can easily be lost, but
never is fully won. Its essence is eternal struggle.
- William H. Hastie

Chapter 1 (in *Holocaust and Human Behavior)* focused on factors that shape an individual's identity. It also described how those factors are sometimes used to exclude people from membership in various groups. Chapter 2 considers the ways a nation's identity is defined. That definition has enormous significance. It indicates who holds power in the nation. And it determines who is a part of its "universe of obligation" – the name Helen Fein has given to the circle of individuals and groups "toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for [amends]."

For much of world history, birth determined who was a part of a group's "universe of obligation" and who was not. As Jacob Bronowski once explained, "The distinction [between self and other] emerges in prehistory in hunting cultures, where competition for limited numbers of food sources requires a clear demarcation between your group and the other group, and this is transferred to agricultural communities in the development of history. Historically this distinction becomes a comparative category in which one judges how like us, or unlike us, is the other, thus enabling people symbolically to organize and divide up their worlds and structure reality."

-**Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book:** *Holocaust and Human Behavior*

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In **Circle 1**, write your name.

In **Circle 2**, write the name of people to whom you feel the greatest obligation ó for example, people for whom you¢d be willing to take a great risk or put yourself in peril for (you don¢t have to write actual names.)

In **Circle 3**, who are the people on the next level? That is people to whom you have some obligation, but not as great as in circle 2.

In **Circle 4**, who are the people on the next level? People to whom you have some obligation, but not as great as in circle 3.

4

3

2

1