

## Universe of Obligation

### *The World As It Could Be* Program Curriculum:

#### Lesson Plan 5: Explore the Universe of Obligation\* – Moving from Rights to Responsibilities

\*Inspired by Facing History and Ourselves Curriculum – <http://www.facinghistory.org>

Universe of Obligation, defined by Helen Fein, is "the circle of individuals and groups toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends." (*Accounting for Genocide*, Helen Fein, Free Press, 1979, p. 4)

Helen Fein is a historical sociologist who is author and editor of 12 books, monographs and many articles on genocide, human rights, collective violence, and altruism. She serves as Executive Director of the Institute for the Study of Genocide (New York) and was a founder and first President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars.

The Universe of Obligation is connected with the concept of the bystander – one standing by, one who is present without taking part in what is occurring.

1. What are examples of being a bystander in our immediate and in wider circles?
2. What are the factors likely to be considered in deciding whether to act or not?
3. What are the possible ramifications and implications of being a bystander?
4. What does the *courage to care* mean in relation to being a bystander?
5. How is the *Universe of Obligation/Responsibilities* connected with learning about the UDHR and the role we play in helping manifest its words?
6. What are examples of minute actions that can have a positive impact in demonstrating the *courage to care*?