

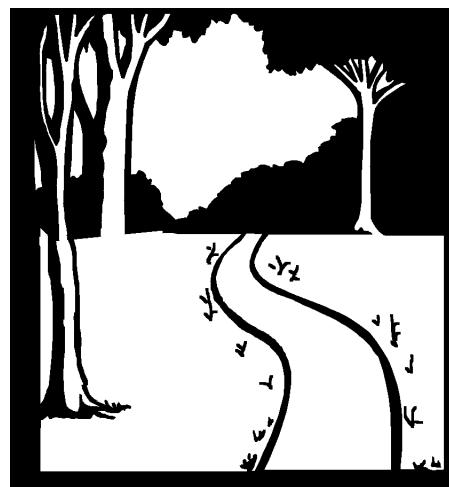
# tools for talking about race & identity: journey maps

*some ideas from the rock dove collective*

*based on resources from the Leading By Example Peer Network*

We offer this tool **not as a fix-it** or stand-alone solution to hate, ignorance, and bias, but as part of an **arsenal against oppression** and a **strategy for building a more just and better world**, beginning with ourselves and those closest to us. The Rock Dove Collective uses it to **strengthen our work with one another** and in our communities, but we are hopeful it can be used in a wide variety of contexts, including **families**, friendships, **neighborhoods**, coalitions and **movements**.

Our values, beliefs, ways of working, politics, and priorities are shaped by our and our communities' histories and experiences of **identity, equity, privilege and oppression**. Whether these things come from or impact our interpersonal relationships, collective dynamics, social justice work, institutional structures of oppression, or daily lives, it can be useful to take time to **recover, appreciate, and gather strength from our own experience**, and to **learn from the experiences of others**. This personal mapping exercise gives us a chance to reflect on the events, experiences, and other influences (from families to institutions) that have shaped us in our own journeys.



On one level, reflecting on our journey over time can help **deepen our awareness** and appreciation for the circumstances, ideas, and individuals who have contributed to our growth, as well as our own **contributions to an ongoing legacy of social change**. An appreciative reflection of our growth can also serve as a starting point for undertaking a more rigorous (strengths and gaps) assessment of our capacity to working with, and in, diverse communities. On another level, the process of sharing our Journey Maps, especially with people of different backgrounds, offers an opportunity to dispel stereotypes, to deepen our knowledge of the histories and experiences of others, to undertake **or carry out a commitment to anti-oppression work**, and to identify common ground and opportunities for collaborative work and solidarity.

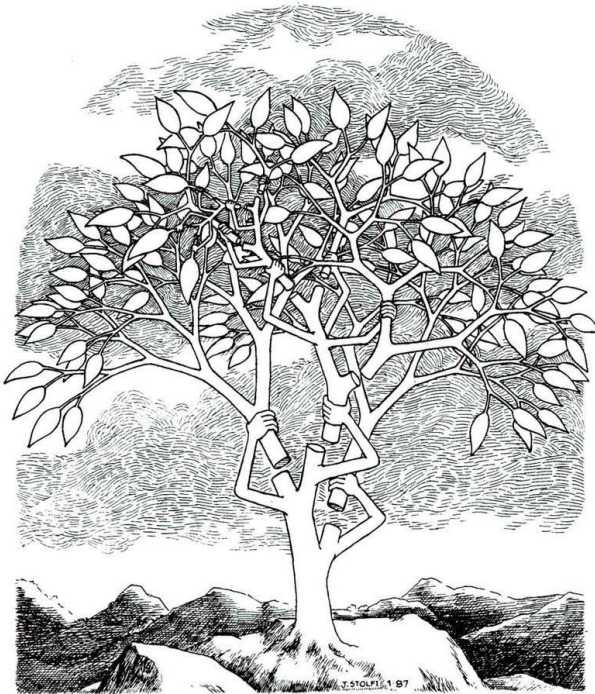
Other people's journeys often surprise us, and they almost always educate us in meaningful ways. Sharing our maps allows us to **hear the truth about each other's journeys**, rather than project our assumptions on one another. Because the sharing of our insights and experiences facilitates a collective identification of **common ground** and, hopefully, a **fuller appreciation for the experiences behind our differences**, the exercise can also be an excellent tool for building or strengthening personal, collective, or movement relationships.

For this exercise, you may choose to explore diversity based on race, ethnicity, class, gender or sex, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, histories of incarceration or surviving violence, or any other aspects of your identities. You may choose to do maps that emphasize one aspect of your identity, or ones that emphasize areas of overlap. We encourage folks to include as a/the central guiding theme their experiences of **equity, oppression, and privilege**.

## Here's one way to go about making and sharing journey maps:

### (1) Draw your maps.

Take a large sheet of chart paper, plenty of colored markers or pens, and make a Journey Map that depicts your own evolving experience of your identity as it relates to equity, oppression, and privilege. You can draw a map of places, a timeline of events that influenced you, concentric circles representing facets of your experiences, linked images of people who have been your teachers, or anything at all that works for you. You can begin when you were a child or with the experiences of your ancestors. You can begin with an event that was a turning point in your life and trace what led up to it and what came from it. You can draw venn diagrams or mountain ranges or parts of your body that represent different facets of who you are. You can include power and powerlessness, privilege and oppression, love and rage. The most important thing is to be creative, and to include the hard stuff.



### (2) More on what to include.

If you are using the exercise to help the members of a group identify and appreciate the common ground and differences in their experiences, you might consider framing the content directions more specifically. For example, in addition to anything else they may choose to include in their map, you might ask participants to note those moments and events when they first began to be aware of or recognized inequity as it relates to some aspect of oppression and/or their own identity, when they saw or experienced an act of inequity that had a powerful impact on them, when they developed a greater awareness of their own privilege, when they connected with their ancestors or predecessors in the movement, or when they witnessed or experienced something so powerful they were moved to respond in action.

### (3) Take a breath. Phew.

This exercise is designed to recover an array of memories and insights that may also surface a range of emotions. Therefore, before moving toward sharing in either small or large groups, people should be given a few moments to collect their thoughts about the themes, issues, and insights that drawing the map have

surfaced for them. People should take deep breaths, laugh or stretch, take a potty break, or even leave the room for a few minutes to get some air. Each person should also take a moment to decide what they do and don't want to share.

### (4) Share maps, tell stories, listen well.

Then, if the group is fairly large (say, bigger than 12 people), you can break into small groups of (3-5 people); give folks the opportunity to share their stories. After each member has had the opportunity to briefly share highlights of their Journey Map, you can open up the discussion more broadly, inviting people to ask one another questions, share about their experience of making the maps, connect with each other's stories, discuss issues and challenges, and plan for where to take the conversation from here. You can also reconvene the whole large group to reflect about the exercise and what it surfaced for people.

### (5) Plan next steps and take them.

While Rock Dove is hopeful that tools like these can play an important part in dismantling oppression and creating a better world, we know that they are only useful insofar as they support broader and more energetic struggles of social and racial justice. We encourage making concrete plans at the end of sharing journey maps—whether those are plans to continue the dialogue in a particular way, refocus or broaden the mission of the group to include issues of inequity and oppression among its priorities, make more concrete commitments to combating oppression, take action, or revolt.