



ROUTLEDGE MENTAL HEALTH CLASSIC EDITIONS

COLLECTIVE TRAUMA, COLLECTIVE HEALING

PROMOTING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN THE AFTERMATH OF DISASTER

JACK SAUL

ROUTLEDGE



“Jack Saul shows professionals how to build community programs that employ primordial human tactics to forge increased community resilience. This book has that rare ability to produce a paradigm shift in how we heal traumatized communities. It’s original and intellectually exciting. I bet it becomes a classic.”

Helen Fisher, PhD, *research professor in the department of anthropology at Rutgers University*

“*Collective Trauma, Collective Healing* is essential reading for all clinical and community-based professionals working with survivors of mass trauma. In contrast to the individualistic, symptom-focused approach of most mental health services, this practice framework addresses the widespread impact of major disasters in families and communities and taps their strengths and resources for recovery and resilience. In this valuable guide, Dr. Saul, an internationally recognized leader at the forefront of the field, draws on his extensive experience and creative initiatives to inform and inspire our response to trauma and tragedy by bringing out the best in families and their communities.”

Froma Walsh, PhD, *codirector at the Chicago Center for Family Health, Firestone Professor Emerita at the University of Chicago, and author of Strengthening Family Resilience*

“This book is a wonderful collection of essays about the ways individuals and communities around the world, from Kosovo to Liberia, and from Tibet, and Chile, to Turkey and to New York after September 11, recover from collective trauma. It is filled with practical suggestions for how narratives, theater, and public performances can promote resilience and recovery in people and communities that have been devastated by wars, natural disasters, and interpersonal violence. It presents a solution-focused approach that emphasizes the individual’s or family’s strengths rather than their problems or pathology. It is a refreshing break from overly concrete prescriptions that ignore cultural and individual differences, and that tend to neglect the healing power of community and collective action.”

Bessel van der Kolk, MD, *professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine and medical director of the Trauma Center*

“Jack Saul invites us to join him in his exploration of territories of torture, helplessness and destruction—a dark continent of inhumanity—and to experience with him the healing capacity of communities. Looking at scenarios as diverse as Kosovo, lower Manhattan on September 11, and the Liberian refugees on Staten Island, he describes how a group of systems thinkers, armed with an extraordinary trust in the power of social connections, joins in partnership with communities in search of justice, reconciliation, and resilience. Written with attention to the small details of survival, an understanding of the power of cultures in history, and the healing capacity of art and theater, Saul shows us the effort and endurance necessary to reconstruct life and restore sanity in societies that have experienced chaos. It is a powerful testimony.”

Salvador Minuchin, MD, *founder of the Minuchin Family Center and author of Families and Family Therapy*

“Jack Saul’s book is terrific and truly compelling for professionals who work with traumatized people. With first-hand stories, he artfully describes a range of out-of-office

interventions to help families, neighborhoods, and communities in the aftermath of disaster. Dr. Saul is never better than when he writes about using the arts to understand the complexities of human trauma and resilience. Yes, even improvisation!”

Pauline Boss, *professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota,
and author of Ambiguous Loss and Loss,
Trauma, and Resilience*

“With compassion and insight, Jack Saul shares his own journey through the aftermath of September 11th as witness, participant, and healer, chronicling the power of collective narrative to transform traumatic experience into communal recovery.”

Alice Greenwald, *director of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum*

“In *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing* Jack Saul takes us through a masterful journey of his healing work addressing the ongoing tragedy of social and political traumas around the world. His work is creative, rich, sensitive, and deeply felt. His writing gives rare glimpses into how science and wisdom must be coalesced to treat the wounds of torture, loss, and devastation. Psychological science, art, and anthropology are so thoughtfully integrated in his work and writing to provide both a history of his intervention work and a guidebook for those brave enough to treat the collective wounds that both nature and humans too often cause. With this volume, Dr. Saul contributes meaningfully to repairing our world.”

Stevan E. Hobfoll, PhD, *the Judd and Marjorie Weinberg Presidential Professor
and chair of the department of behavioral sciences
at Rush University Medical Center*

“Jack Saul’s clear and compelling narrative, based on his immersion in several catastrophes, offers practical knowledge on community resilience strategies for responding to collective trauma that will be highly informative for practitioners across many disciplines.”

Stevan Weine, MD, *professor of psychiatry at the University of Illinois at Chicago
and author of Testimony After Catastrophe*

“In *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing*, Dr. Saul provides a detailed documentation of what it takes to recognize, develop, and sustain a community environment that promotes healing from mass disaster. Throughout the multiple examples in the book, including personal challenges to his own community in the wake of September 11, the author emphasizes the importance of going beyond individual approaches to mount a public health response after any disaster. Dr. Saul has a deep respect for systems and how they work, while never denying the inevitable tensions that occur and the competing agendas that can easily sabotage recovery efforts. As man-made and natural disasters increase in frequency and intensity, few of us are prepared by our professional training, to know what to do when faced with the kind of social challenge that Dr. Saul describes. This book, with all the lessons learned, becomes a must-read book for public and private managers.”

Sandra L. Bloom, MD, *co-director of the Center for Nonviolence
and Social Justice at the Drexel University School of Public Health*

“Jack Saul is a dedicated healer whose deep understanding of systems therapy has taken him to the aid of injured communities around the globe. Yet it was September 11 that literally brought these lessons home, making him an insider to catastrophe. This blend

of outsider knowledge and insider wisdom makes this *the* book on collective recovery. It will transform our practice.”

Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD, *professor of clinical psychiatry and socio-medical sciences at the New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University*

“Most books simply espouse principles or ideal goals, telling us what to aim for, but not how to get there, and almost never do they walk us through the messy process of working in the wake of conflict. Saul’s book not only breaks critically important fresh ground in setting out the critical role that collective resilience plays in allowing individuals and communities to transform themselves after traumatic events. He also takes us with him on the journeys he travelled to make the discoveries he can now share. The various stories in his book convey the critical message that we cannot know the answer before we begin, at the same time as providing us with a toolkit of indispensable principles and resources for action.”

Danielle Celermajer, PhD, *associate professor and director of the Torture Prevention Project at the University of Sydney*

“Jack Saul’s compelling book is a major achievement in the literature on trauma and recovery, nudging the discourse from the individual to the community. This must-read book for mental health professionals and creative arts therapists blends psychotherapy and expressive therapy, reflection and action, featuring communities of dialogue front and center, capable of re-building destroyed edifices of the city and the soul.”

Robert Landy, PhD, *professor and director of the drama therapy program at New York University*

“Jack Saul brings to this book years of outstanding contribution and experience addressing the psychological needs of those exposed to many different types of disaster. As governments at all levels seek better ways to make communities resilient, this book offers much needed practical guidance for policy and practice. It is a unique contribution to an emerging field that is understanding that early intervention is always better, but that it’s never too late to offer help in culturally appropriate ways.”

Michael Ungar, PhD, *professor of social work at Dalhousie University and co-director of the Resilience Research Centre*

“*Collective Trauma, Collective Healing* can serve as an introduction to understanding the effects of widespread trauma and responding to its impact at the level of the community and would be suitable for students and novice professionals as well as for seasoned professionals. In addition, this book has the potential to help break through the limited and limiting lens of impaired psychological functioning as consisting solely of individual psychopathology responsive only to one-on-one intervention. If it contributes to a shift in this perspective, it will have accomplished much more than Saul may have intended.”

Steven N. Gold, *Nova Southeastern University, PsycCRITIQUES*



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Collective Trauma, Collective Healing

Collective Trauma, Collective Healing is a guide for mental health professionals working in response to large-scale political violence or natural disaster. It provides a framework that practitioners can use to develop their own community-based, collective approach to treating trauma and providing clinical services that are both culturally and contextually appropriate. The classic edition includes a new preface from the author reflecting on changes to the field and the world since the book's initial publication.

The book draws on experience of working with survivors, their families, and communities in the Holocaust, post-war Kosovo, the Liberian civil wars, and post-9/11 Lower Manhattan. It tracks the development of community programs and projects based on a family and community resilience approach, including those that enhance the collective capacities for narration and public conversation.

Clinicians and community practitioners will come away from *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing* with a solid understanding of new roles they may play in disasters—roles that encourage them to recognize and enhance the resilience and coping skills in families, organizations, and the community at large.

Jack Saul, PhD, is the founding director of the International Trauma Studies Program (ITSP), a research and training institute based in New York City. ITSP is committed to enhancing the natural resilience and coping capacities in individuals, families, and communities that have endured and/or are threatened by traumatic events. He has served on the faculties of New York University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, the New School for Social Research, Clinical Psychology Program, and Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health. As a psychologist and family therapist, he has created a number of clinical and community-based programs in NYC and abroad for populations that have endured disaster, war, torture, and political violence. He consults with international organizations and has a private practice in Manhattan.

ROUTLEDGE MENTAL HEALTH CLASSIC EDITIONS

The *Routledge Mental Health Classic Edition* series celebrates Routledge's commitment to excellence within the field of mental health. These books are recognized as timeless classics covering a range of important issues and continue to be recommended as key reading for professionals and students in the area. With a new introduction that explores what has changed since the books were first published, and why these books are as relevant now as ever, the series presents key ideas to a new generation.

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Collective Trauma, Collective Healing

Promoting Community Resilience in the
Aftermath of Disaster

Classic Edition

Jack Saul

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Preface to the Classic Edition

It is May 2021. As I write this preface to the second edition of *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing*, I find myself reflecting on how this book has increased in relevance over the past year. The events of 2020 have brought the concept of collective trauma to the forefront—and with it, the need to view the individual and collective consequences of traumatic events or chronic traumatic situations in U.S. society such as racism and inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic is undeniably a collective trauma that demands not just individual approaches but coping at the levels of individual, family, community, nation, and planet. It has led to the realization among many that global collective traumas such as pandemics and climate change require us to galvanize our collective resilience to meet the challenges we now face.

Both our collective immunity and collective problem solving depend on our capacity to come together to effectively address such challenges and to prevent or heal the fragmentation and conflict that reduce our collective resilience and lead to greater vulnerability to trauma. The need for social distancing has brought home the idea that our greatest protection against a collective trauma like the pandemic is social connection and support. Yet that very connection in a time of deadly contagion also becomes one of our greatest threats. Fortunately, social media has given us new tools to remain connected, and to provide mutual support, under such circumstances.

The year 2019, the 400th anniversary of the beginning of slavery in the United States, also brought greater attention to the culture of inequality that impacts not only people of color but all U.S. citizens. It was apparent soon after the pandemic started that COVID was disproportionately taking the lives of people of color at a higher rate than other groups in our society. This is due to vulnerabilities caused by unequal access to health and financial resources, having to work in essential jobs with their higher exposure to the virus, and poorer health status due to the debilitating stress of living in communities with low resources and high exposure to violence. The increased visibility of racially motivated police violence in our society reached a crisis

point in May 2020 with the killing of George Floyd, mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people of all races, in the U.S. and abroad, to take to the streets to call for an end to such mistreatment. The history of racial violence has also underlined the debilitating effects of chronic and multigenerational collective trauma. It has unleashed myriad creative re-conceptualizations of collective approaches to healing such racialized trauma.

Both COVID-19 and racial inequality are foundational to—and catalytic of—the social rupture that culminated with the storming of the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6, 2021. The process of political polarization as a symptom of collective trauma in U.S. society has been steadily increasing and has brought our attention to another systemic realm that we must take into consideration: the infosphere. This realm of our ecological system that includes the digital transmission of information and cultural knowledge has been vulnerable to manipulation in promoting social and political fragmentation. The isolation of different political and special interest groups has given rise to informational echo chambers without access to diverse news sources that may challenge erroneously held beliefs. We have now reached a crisis in which we lack a fact-based consensual reality. In my interview on CNN (<https://edition.cnn.com/>) during April 2020, as the pandemic was gaining momentum, I highlighted the overarching collective trauma of social division that was severely depleting the psychosocial resources needed to build our capacity to fight the pandemic. Itself a pandemic, this divisiveness was undermining our collective immunity to COVID.

Thanks to the growing attention to shared trauma and the need to pool our responses to promote healing, some ideas of the collective framework have caught on in the past ten years. Nationally and globally, our understanding of trauma has begun to expand beyond the dominant narrative that emphasizes individualized fear or attachment-based responses. The lessons of our recent national and global trauma have sensitized us to the more encompassing dimensions of trauma such as loss and relational disruption as well as crises of identity, meaning, and moral coherence. We have seen an expansion in practices and research that accentuates recognizing and enhancing existing strengths in individuals and collectives. Accompanying these transformations has been a new push for processes that lead to greater social cohesion and cooperation.

However, despite the progress made in adopting more of a collective approach, the prevailing viewpoint of the effects of trauma—and the bulk of the resilient responses—remain individualistic. Most practitioners have yet to make a paradigm shift to a multi-systemic perspective.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and other pressing developments, we need an approach that simultaneously keeps an eye on

resilient processes in individuals as well as in families, communities, organizations, cultures, and societies that have their own rules and trajectories.

Collective Trauma, Collective Healing may be more relevant today in its second edition. It lays out in a series of case studies a basic framework for a social-ecological understanding of collective trauma. And it presents practical methods for mobilizing groups to recognize and access their collective resilience in order to meet new challenges. The book has proven to be useful not only for mental health practitioners but for a diverse array of professionals and community members who are engaged in the work of collective healing. There is much to be done in this field, and I am honored that Routledge has chosen this book to be reissued as a classic edition.

Jack Saul, Ph.D.
May 5, 2021

Preface to the First Edition

This book is the story of my professional and personal journey over the last 15 years working with survivors of political violence, their families, and communities. I started working as a psychologist in clinics in New York City and moved to the streets, schools, churches, theater studios, and community centers to work as a collaborator with refugees who were rebuilding their lives. It was not only a geographical move, but also a conceptual shift in which I grew to appreciate the role of social context and the collective capacities in families and communities to recover from massive psychosocial trauma and loss. My personal story is inseparable from the story I tell here, for just weeks after returning from Kosovo, the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center took place in my neighborhood, having a tremendous impact on me personally as well as on my family, my community, and my country. I found myself in the role of an insider practitioner after having collaborated with many who had played that role in contexts where they themselves had endured major catastrophe. I realized I had learned a great deal from these and other colleagues about how I could help promote a process of collective recovery in New York City. After working with my own community, I applied that experience to a community resilience project with the underserved Liberian refugee community across the Hudson River in Staten Island.

Today, we often hear the term resilience in the context of disaster—which usually refers to an individual's capacity to rebound or bounce back following adversity. Researchers and practitioners have increasingly come to see that the resilience of an individual does not exist in a vacuum—it is a function of one's social and cultural context. It is commonly referred to today as community resilience—we are looking at the collective capacities in families, communities, organizations, and society at large that are more than the sum of individual capacities. We have come to recognize today that community resilience is a crucial factor in recovering from adversity, and in preventing long-term mental health and social difficulties (Norris, Friedman, Watson, Byrne, Diaz, & Kaniasty, 2002; Padgett, 2002).

This book is for mental health professionals working in the aftermath of disaster as well as emergency management professionals. It will be especially useful for insider practitioners from affected communities as well as community members who have decided to take an active role in promoting a process of collective recovery in their own neighborhoods, communities, or cities.

I received a great deal of guidance and support from the community research writing group at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, which urged me to spend a lot of time first documenting in detail the narrative unfolding of my experience working on these projects. Then, with a team of research assistants, we reviewed and analyzed more than 300 hours of videotapes of interviews, community meetings, and implemented projects, in order to better understand how the process of collective recovery unfolded. During the process, it forced me to relive without avoidance some of the most difficult experiences I lived through with my family in the months following 9/11. As a result, it has also more firmly anchored my understanding of collective recovery in my experience carrying out these projects.

Foreword to the First Edition

As series editor of the Psychosocial Stress Series I would like to welcome *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster* to the book series. The purpose of the book series is to provide busy professionals with useful and timely information to guide their work with those seeking help in facing and overcoming significant adversity. Like the first book in this series, *Stress Disorders Among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research, and Treatment* (Brunner-Routledge, 1978), *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing* is an extraordinary contribution to the field of psychological trauma that focuses on ways of enhancing community resilience following disaster.

The author, Dr. Jack M. Saul, is a well-known trauma psychologist who is the founding and current director of the International Trauma Studies Program, affiliated with Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. Professor Saul's work in New York and around the world is well known by both researchers and practitioners.

The idea for this book emerged from discussions with Dr. Saul several years ago. We talked over coffee at the Mille-Feuille Bakery Café, a popular spot squeezed between upscale condos and trendy Manhattan boutiques close to New York University's main campus. It was nearly ten years before this that Jack and I had first met, along with several dozen of his colleagues, days after the 2001 terrorist attack that changed his city, and the United States, forever. He makes reference to this meeting early in his book.

Over coffee, he talked of his many humanitarian efforts of the last 20 years, why he established the International Trauma Studies Program, and a new paradigm for promoting resilience in communities—one that would not simply focus on crisis intervention and PTSD-prevention in the wake of disasters. He discussed how 9/11 energized his trauma program and his colleagues to move toward this new paradigm of pragmatism. They began to focus on the fundamental principles of working with collective trauma that can lead to collective healing. His writings, lectures, and training emphasized the importance of culture, meaning, and hope.

In this book, Dr. Saul lays out guidelines and practices for psychosocial responses to various types of catastrophes. At the same time, he establishes a framework that practitioners can use to develop their own community-based, collective approach to treating collective trauma. This approach can also be used to provide and time clinical services that meet precise cultural expectations and requirements.

This book emerged over the last three years through reviewing more than 300 hours of video and other data gathered from more than a decade of work around the world and throughout the United States. It is also a distillation of a two-year disaster-response workshop series and discussion group with mental health professionals. Moreover, to grasp the significance of collective trauma interventions, Dr. Saul interviewed many dozens of community members who participated in community-based recovery work and leading professionals worldwide who are currently engaged in family and community resilience approaches to massive trauma, which included good and bad examples of effective trauma resilience efforts.

The book is a beautiful collection of the wisdom of human collective behavior, the philosophy of helping, and a blueprint for approaching, fitting in with and assisting the traumatized community of survivors. Like the first book in this series, *Collective Trauma*, *Collective Healing* will quickly become a classic and highly referenced text because it challenges the current approaches to trauma response and, in doing so, significantly improves our chances of forging significant and sustainable healing.

Charles R. Figley, PhD

Series Editor

New Orleans, January 2013

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In writing this book I drew upon many connections with teachers, colleagues, and friends from many disciplines. Hillel Klein and Elie Wiesel set the stage in graduate school for my professional work on collective trauma. Salvador Minuchin, Randy Gerson, Jorge Colapinto, Carlos Sluzki, Peter Fraenkel, Pauline Boss, Froma Walsh, you have been important teachers and colleagues in the field of systemic family therapy. A special thanks to Judith Landau, who provided the framework and mentorship for many of the projects described in this book. Soeren Buss Jensen, my co-founder of the International Trauma Studies Program (ITSP), I value your ongoing support. Steven Reisner, Nancy Baron, Deborah Munczek, Madelyn Miller, Saralee Kahn, Donna Gaffney, Marsha Shelov, Nancy Wallace, Saliha Bava, and Sonali Sharma have been my trusted fellows at the International Trauma Studies Program. To the actors and directors of Theater Arts Against Political Violence: Abigail Gampel, Lucy McLellan, Carlos Caldart, Meagan Auster-Rosen, John Burt, Garretson Sherman, Arianne Zaytzeff, and Robert Gourp—thank you. The ITSP has been blessed by the contributions of noted colleagues and friends, among them Melinda Meyer, Bessel van der Kolk, Sandra Bloom, Stevan Hobfoll, Fran Norris, Yael Danieli, Alastair Ager, Winnifred Simon, and Robert Jay Lifton. My colleagues from the Kosovar Family Professional Education Collaborative: Ferid Agani, Stevan Weine, Shukria Statovci, Shqipe Ukshine, Afrim Blyta, Jusef Ulaj, Mimosa Shahini, Ellen Pulleyblank-Coffey, Corkie Becker, John Sargeant, Mellisa Elliot, John Rolland, Jim Griffith, Kaethe Weingarten, and Jane Ariel—our work together may soon continue. From the Chilean immigrant community in New York City, Ernesto and Maryanne Castillo, Victor and Nieves Torres, and Emelio Banda, you have been a great inspiration. To those who were instrumental in promoting the post-9/11 community resilience work in New York City—Claude Chemtob, Jack Rosenthal, Carol Prendergast, Linda Mills, Esther Cohen, Liz Margolies, Hally Breindel, Fred Wistow, and the many staff and participants of the Downtown Community Resource Center. To Jacob Massaquoi, Gene Prisco,

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I am truly grateful for the contributions of the research team at the International Trauma Studies Program—Nat Pinkerton, Ali Rodriguez, Rachel Lev, Amanda Goodman, Perry Nagin, Cyril Benounna, Lauren Cubelis, Laura Merryman, Julia Richter, Vanessa Smith-Levine, and Nira Shah—this was truly a collective endeavor. And to those who have contributed as editorial advisors: Jennifer Dworkin and Victoria Horowitz; and to the book's editors in its final stage, Jennifer Wholey and Griffin Shea. A special acknowledgment to Mindy Fullilove and the Columbia University writing group—Lourdes Hernandez, Ann Burack Weiss, and Helena Hanson—who provided the shape and encouragement for this project. And thank you to Charles Figley for the invitation to write this book and to Anna Moore, my editor at Routledge. My deepest appreciation goes to my family, who not only supported me but also contributed to the book—my sons, Noam and Adam, and my wife Esther Perel.

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