

*The Merging of Knowledge:  
People in Poverty and Academics  
Thinking Together  
By Fourth World University Research*

This book relates the success of a seemingly impossible challenge: to have a group of academics and people living in persistent poverty conduct research together. What conditions can the knowledge drawn from poverty cross with academic rigor? What type of knowledge does this collaboration result in? This is what *The Merging of Knowledge* presents in terms of the processes of The Fourth World-University program and the result of its five groups of work: history, family, knowledge, work and human activity, and citizenship.

The results featured in this book can be appreciated on many levels. At the level of content, this unique collaboration offers knowledge from the very poor regarding their lives that is neglected or misunderstood in fields as varied as history, family sociology, work sociology, and political science. This "voice of the voiceless" is brought to the book by collaborative writing and is presented with the academics' methodological and epistemological contribution. At the level of gathering and understanding the information collected, the very poor are often given the role as "witnesses" of poverty in interviews. Here, as researchers, they contribute to rigorously examined content that illuminates their situations.

"People living in poverty are capable of reflection, expression, and analysis. For me, this is not a hypothesis but an observation. This book, *The Merging of Knowledge*, is the story of an encounter of two approaches to knowledge, one weighted towards experience, the other toward interpretation. This encounter makes me realize that we need to replace an abstract philosophy of the social with a concrete philosophy of persons who act." - Alain Touraine, Sociologist

"The groundbreaking search for useable knowledge of poverty and exclusion described in this unique book demonstrates the role that can be played in the formulation of that knowledge by academics, by professionals, and by the poor themselves. Here, at last, is a deeply serious and innovative effort to blend the special perspectives of academics, professionals, and the poor into a new and respectful synthesis. This book demonstrates what it takes to really hear and use what each participant (and especially the poor) brings to the table. Every reader—student, teacher, researcher, professional, activist, policy maker—will think differently about what contributes to knowledge after reading this book." - Harold Richman

Hermon Dunlap Smith Professor Emeritus, University of Chicago; founding  
director of the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

"Since the emergence of social science in the 19th-century, there has been much study of poverty and the poor. But until now, no one has attempted to include the poor themselves as equal partners in this intellectual project. *The Merging of Knowledge: People in Poverty and Academics* is an exemplary beginning in what may well become a new method, and a new philosophy, of social research." - Frances Fox Piven, The City University of New York

"...Essential reading for anyone concerned with poverty today." – Professor William Julius Wilson, Harvard University

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