In 1970 the *Harvard Educational Review* published an article by Ray Rist that described how, for the one class of children he observed, their public school not only mirrored the class system of the larger society but also actively contributed to maintaining it. Now, thirty years later, the Editorial Board of the *Harvard Educational Review* has decided to reprint this article as part of the HER Classics Series. We hope that by reacquainting readers with this article, and by introducing it to new readers, we can encourage all of us to think about the work that remains in creating a just and equitable educational experience for all children.

Many studies have shown that academic achievement is highly correlated with social class. Few, however, have attempted to explain exactly how the school helps to reinforce the class structure of the society. In this article, Dr. Rist reports the results of an observational study of one class of ghetto children during their kindergarten, first- and second-grade years. He shows how the kindergarten teacher placed the children in reading groups which reflected the social class composition of the class, and how these groups persisted throughout the first several years of elementary school. The way in which the teacher behaved toward the different groups became an important influence on the children's achievement. Dr. Rist concludes by examining the relationship between the "caste" system of the classroom and the class system of the larger society.

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MAXWELL M. YURKOFSKY
Self-fulfilling prophecy, process through which an originally false expectation leads to its own confirmation. In a self-fulfilling prophecy an individual’s expectations about another person or entity eventually result in the other person or entity acting in ways that confirm the expectations. However, empirical research on self-fulfilling prophecies in education has not provided any evidence of accumulation. Rather than accumulating to become larger and larger over time, the effects of self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom dissipate over time, as they become smaller and smaller. Given the evidence for generally high accuracy in teachers’ expectations, strongly erroneous teachers’ expectations may be the exception rather than the rule. In his 1970 article, “Student Social Class and Teachers’ Expectations: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Ghetto Education,” Ray Rist observed an African American classroom with an African American teacher. He discovered that after only eight days in the classroom, the teacher felt that she knew her students’ abilities well enough to assign them to separate worktables. To Table One, she assigned those she considered “fast learners.” These students sat at the front of the class, closest to her. “Average” students were placed at Table Two, and the “slow learners” were placed at Table Three. A self-fulfilling prophecy is a sociological term used to describe what happens when a false belief influences people’s behavior in such a way that it ultimately shapes reality. This concept has appeared in many cultures for centuries, but American sociologist Robert K. Merton coined the term and developed it for use in sociology. Merton’s description of the self-fulfilling prophecy is rooted in the Thomas theorem, formulated by sociologists W. I. Thomas and D. S. Thomas. This theorem states that if people define situations as real, they are then real in their consequences. Conversely, when a teacher has low expectations for a student and communicates this to the student, the student will perform more poorly in school than she otherwise would. Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Sociology: A Look at the Theory of Robert Merton, Rosenthal and the Pygmalion Effect. The Cycle of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies. This compelling tale helped the self-fulfilling prophecy become a popular trope in literature and film, but it’s also a much-researched concept in psychology. Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Psychology. The cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies can be positive for the “promising” students, but the cycle can damage those who are assumed to be incompetent.
or lacking by themselves and/or by others. Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and Depression. Unsurprisingly, this cyclical nature of self-fulfilling prophecies can play a role in developing and deepening depression.