

Powerball: Cashing in on the 'Lootery'

I remember when I was about 7 or 8 years of age, the two elderly ladies who lived downstairs from my family would give me a ladies' handkerchief tied in a knot with some coins and a piece of paper inside. They would have me walk up the street and give it to another lady about two or three times a week. Of course, I would get a piece of candy or a nickel for doing so. Little did I know at the time that I was "playing the numbers" for them.

Back then it was a game of chance that involved a few pennies bet on a number, which I believe came out each day in the newspaper business section. I think it had something to do with the closing number on the stock exchange or something like that. I can hear the older folks who are reading this article saying exactly what it was and how the winning number was retrieved. I am sure they remember.

Fast forward to the early 1970s, I believe, when the states began commandeering the numbers racket, primarily run in Black neighborhoods, and turned an illegal activity into a legal game of chance, called the Lottery, which has evolved into what I call the "Lootery." The few coins in the



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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handkerchief and the hopes of winning \$25 or so have changed to monthly shell-outs of hundreds of dollars by individuals with hopes of winning millions of dollars. The only thing that has not changed among many Black folks is the dream book that tells what number to play if you happen to dream about death, or the sky, or a trip, or a meal, or a new job, or a car, or a truck, or the devil, or God, or you name it. Whatever the dream, there was a corresponding number attached to it.

The lines formed at the stores and folks started spending millions and billions on "the number," all in an effort to "hit it." Many folks would use their last dollar, their rent money, their bill money, their lunch money, to take a chance because they had a feeling or a certain dream, or saw a certain number somewhere. The

funniest thing was the folks in line with their sheets of paper and their long list of numbers to play each week. When they got up to the counter they would almost whisper the number to the clerk. I often wondered why they would do that; I attributed it to a scarcity mentality and the fact that some of us don't want our brother or sister to prosper, thus, we keep our winning numbers to ourselves.

The recent \$580 million Powerball jackpot, the largest in history,

and except for those who hit it big and then lived in misery after winning, most people would do some very good things with their windfall. But, in general, the "Lootery" has become a legalized frenzy of transferring hard-earned dollars mostly from those who can least afford it, to high-salaried "Lootery" directors and others who just love it when those balls start dropping through the tubes. They always win, no matter which numbers come out. Sure, some of

winners increase proportionately. I am no mathematician, but it seems simple enough to me; just have 10 drawings. If only one person wins among the 10 drawings pay out one-tenth, move on to the next week, and draw 10 once again. I am sure some of those highly paid "Lootery" directors can figure it out.

My point is this: If we are going to have \$500 million as a prize, why not intentionally spread that prize to more people. I would love to see 10 winners of \$50 million, or even 100, \$5 million winners, rather than one winner, or even two splitting a \$500 million pot. Think about that when you're standing in the next line of "Lootery" hopefuls and dreamers. Who knows? Maybe there can be some changes made in how the prize money is allocated, and you will have a better chance of winning. Oh yeah, remember a brother when you hit.

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was the craze of new wave "Lootery" players. Some folks spent hundreds and thousands of dollars on 1 chance in 175 million to win all that money. Finally on Thursday morning, November 29, millions of people were tearing up their worthless tickets as their dreams of winning the prize were dashed. The "Lootery" had gotten them again.

I guess it's fun and it feels good to imagine what you would do with a few hundred million dol-

the money goes to schools, but where is the benefit when it comes to our children receiving a better education? In general, the "Lootery" is just another regressive tax.

Here's my solution to making the Powerball "Lootery" at least a bit more palatable and the chances of winning a bit higher. When the total gets to \$100 million, let the drawing be for 10 winners of \$10 million each. As the pot increases, the individual amounts for the 10

Opportunity and Diversity One Industry at a Time

There is a missing component to the national discussion concerning how to strengthen and rebuild the American economy. It is true that high unemployment, a weak national infrastructure, the need for stronger public education, the concentration of wealth and the deficit are all challenges to the nation's economy but being left out of the discussion is the continued economic marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities.

The American economy has always been strongest when it's kept the middle class within reach for most Americans. But with white households holding nearly 20 times the wealth of black or Latino households, and with rising disparities in unemployment, poverty, and income, the future of the middle class has never looked more uncertain. As the country rapidly becomes majority-minority the nation's economic well-being is increasingly tied to overcoming racial economic inequality.

The economic challenges that people of color face are reflected in the recently released NAACP Opportunity and Diversity Report Card which analyzes the hotel and lodging industry. Mediocre grades among the five leading hotels we examined—Hyatt, Starwood, Wyndham, Marriott and Hilton—reveal the widespread lack of investment in minority suppliers, the over representation of people of color in the lowest paying entry level positions, the under representation in the more highly paid career track positions and finally a lack of commitment to collecting basic diversity data that could be used to strengthen inclusion efforts.

Our report shows that black-

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owned businesses, which comprise 7 percent of all businesses in the U.S., make up only 0.9 percent of all vendors receipts—a troubling red flag that signals how far corporate America has to go in their supplier diversity outreach. And while people of color are 36 percent of the population, only 13 percent of the governing bodies in the hotel and lodging industry consist of people of color.

One of the most disconcerting findings of our report card is that all of the top 5 hotel and lodging corporations do not collect diversity data from their franchise properties. This means for four out of five of these leading corporations no data is collected for the majority of their individual hotels. This is unacceptable.

The NAACP is calling for these corporations to collect the diversity data already mandated by the government through EEO1 reports. We are also asking for planners of major events to request EEO1 reports from any individual hotel they are considering for their event so they can make diversity and inclusion part of their assessment as to which hotel is worthy of their business. The National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners has already voiced support for this action and we will be working with our community and civil rights partners as well as local bureaus of tourism to make widespread the use of EEO1 data as an important and widely used factor for determining which hotels qualify to hold major events.

The EEO1 survey is a primary

means that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission uses to advance its mission derived from the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act focused on prohibiting racial discrimination in employment and almost 60 years later we still find great racial and ethnic disparities

in business and its workforce. The Opportunity and Diversity Report Card and our call to action for greater use of EEO1 data should not be seen as just a "civil rights" matter but should be understood as a means of dealing with one of the greatest threats facing the American economy over the next thirty

years, racial economic inequality. We at the NAACP have always seen racial inequality as a grave threat to the country and in the next few decades if serious action isn't taken to bridge this divide the entire nation will see the economic results of this inequality.

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