

# Hitting the Lottery Jackpot: State Governments and the Taxing of Dreams



When thirteen machine shop workers from Ohio won a \$295.7 million lotto jackpot, the largest ever, it made headlines. But the real story is that the lottery is a losing proposition for the vast majority who play it. Hitting the Lottery Jackpot provides the hard truth to the questions everybody asks: What are my chances of winning? Doesn't the money go to education? Isn't it harmless? This concise book explains who really profits from lotteries—advertising agencies, TV stations, and ticket vendors—and that shows only about half the money wagered is returned as prizes, the rest pocketed by state governments. Hitting the Lottery Jackpot also demonstrates who loses: lower-income groups and people of color, who spend a much higher percentage of their income on lotteries than others. David Nibert connects the rise of lotteries, illegal in every state before the 1960s, to the economic stagnation beginning in the 1970s, when budgetary crises prompted legislatures to seek new revenues. Difficult economic times produced uncertainty and anxiety for the working class, leading many poor and middle-income people, yearning for security, to throw away huge sums on lotteries they stand almost no chance of winning. Finally, Nibert explores the ideological dimensions of the lottery—the get-rich-quick individualism that they promote among the very groups who would be better served by political action and solidarity. Hitting the Lottery Jackpot is a powerful case for seeing lotteries as a pernicious government tax on the poor, seductively disguised as fun.

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costs of state reliance on lotteries to generate public revenues. David Nibert.