
POSTCOLONIAL PROMISSORY: REPARATIONS, SEIZURE, DEFERRAL AND THE JAMAICAN LOTTO SCAM



JOVAN SCOTT LEWIS

**Assistant Professor of African-American Studies and Geography
University of California, Berkeley**

“Lotto scammers” in Jamaica who use Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephony to con American citizens into sending money to Jamaica see their practice as a form of reparations for the long histories and circuits of colonial and postcolonial inequality. Rather than focusing on reparations as a quantification of redress, which renders restitution as the sole responsibility of appropriate former colonial powers, this paper will explore how, through a reparative logic of seizure, scammers reformulate sites of transgression and the currencies and processes for repayment. Doing so asks us to reconsider the concept of reparations in the Caribbean, opening it up to serve as more than a means of recompense withheld by one party and expected by the other. Instead, reparations becomes an engagement that denotes the continued productivity of postcolonial relations where transgression and transaction proffer novel forms of dialogic reciprocity.

Jovan Scott Lewis is Assistant Professor of African-American Studies and Geography at the University of California, Berkeley, as well as the co-chair of the Economic Disparities Research Cluster at Berkeley’s Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society. He received his Ph.D. in Anthropology from the London School of Economics. His research examines socio-economic frames, ethics, rationalizations, and practices that organize the lived experience of race, poverty, and inequality in the Caribbean and the United States. This interest is taken up in his current book project that examines how disadvantaged black Jamaicans engaged in the practice of international “lottery scamming” mobilize a reparative logic of seizure in utilizing the development apparatuses of internet communication technology, customer service procedures, and money transfer services, to secure economic and social mobility.

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