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Illegal Bolita Paved the Way for New Lottery

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A historical reason why Florida’s state-run lottery is so popular:

"Bolita, introduced to Tampa by the Cubans in the 1880s, means ‘little ball.’ A hundred balls, consecutively numbered, are tied in a bag and tossed from one person to another. One ball is clutched through the cloth and this bears the winning number.

"Played by Negroes and whites alike in Jacksonville, Key West, Miami, Tampa and surrounding towns, bolita has sponsored a great variety of superstitions. Some of these, traceable to the Chinese who brought the game to Cuba, include Oriental interpretations of dreams. As a result the sale of all dream books as well as publications on astrology and numerology has boomed.

"For thousands of Tampa folk, bolita has invested nearly all of the commonplace occurrences of life with the symbolism of figures. House addresses, auto licenses, theater stubs, steps, telephone poles, or anything that can be counted, added, subtracted or divided are grist for bolita. Equipped with the additional resources of voodooism, the Cuban Negro can begin with virtually any incident and arrive at a bolita number. He is equally adroit at explaining his miscalculations."

-From The WPA Guide to Florida, 1939