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BOLETIM DE CONJUNTURA

BOCA

Ano VI | Volume 20 | Nº 58 | Boa Vista | 2024

<http://www.ioles.com.br/boca>

ISSN: 2675-1488

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14193932>



A CRITICAL REVIEW OF “THE FIRST 21 YEARS OF THE 21ST CENTURY: OBSERVATIONS FROM JAMAICA”

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Abstract

Professor Paul Golding's *The First 21 Years of the 21st Century: Observations from Jamaica* offers a comprehensive analysis of contemporary Jamaica, exploring technological advancements, socio-economic changes, and the impact of the novel Coronavirus. The book aims to provide a multifaceted understanding of Jamaica's recent past, present, and potential future by examining the relationship between local and global forces. The book employed a multidisciplinary approach that draws on historical analysis, social observation, and economic data. Golding uses qualitative and quantitative methods, including historical and statistical data review, to support his observations and arguments. Golding examines critical developments such as the digital revolution, social and political shifts, and the unparalleled challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The book highlights the rapid technological advancements in Jamaica, the persistent socio-economic gaps, and the profound impact of the pandemic on various sectors of society. While the book offers valuable insights into the complexities of contemporary Jamaica, such as the deregulation of telecommunication, the China-Jamaica relationship, the US elections, and the issue of corruption, this review identifies areas that require further depth and specificity. This includes an analysis of technological integration in education, a root cause analysis of homophobia, the implications of the Data Protection Act of 2020 for National Identification Systems, and the long-term effects of the pandemic in Jamaica. By addressing these significant areas of inquiry, scholars and policymakers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Jamaica yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Keywords: COVID-19; Digital Revolution; Jamaica; Policy Implications; Social Change.

Resumo

O livro “*The First 21 Years of the 21st Century: Observations from Jamaica*”, do professor Paul Golding, oferece uma análise abrangente da Jamaica contemporânea, explorando avanços tecnológicos, mudanças socioeconômicas e o impacto do novo Coronavírus. O livro visa fornecer uma compreensão multifacetada do passado recente, presente e futuro potencial da Jamaica, examinando a relação entre forças locais e globais. O livro empregou uma abordagem multidisciplinar que se baseia em análise histórica, observação social e dados econômicos. Golding usa métodos qualitativos e quantitativos, incluindo revisão de dados históricos e estatísticos, para apoiar suas observações e argumentos. Golding examina desenvolvimentos críticos, como a revolução digital, mudanças sociais e políticas e os desafios inigualáveis da pandemia da COVID-19. O livro destaca os rápidos avanços tecnológicos na Jamaica, as persistentes lacunas socioeconômicas e o profundo impacto da pandemia em vários setores da sociedade. Embora o livro ofereça insights valiosos sobre as complexidades da Jamaica contemporânea, como a desregulamentação das telecomunicações, a relação China-Jamaica, as eleições nos EUA e a questão da corrupção, esta revisão identifica áreas que exigem mais profundidade e especificidade. Isso inclui uma análise da integração tecnológica na educação, uma análise da causa raiz da homofobia, as implicações da Lei de Proteção de Dados de 2020 para Sistemas Nacionais de Identificação e os efeitos de longo prazo da pandemia na Jamaica. Ao abordar essas áreas significativas de investigação, acadêmicos e formuladores de políticas podem contribuir para uma compreensão mais matizada da Jamaica ontem, hoje e amanhã.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19; Implicações Políticas; Jamaica; Mudança Social; Revolução Digital.

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INTRODUCTION

The island of Jamaica, small but mighty in presence, has navigated significant changes in the first two decades of the 21st century. Professor Paul Golding's *The First 21 Years of the 21st Century: Observation from Jamaica* offers a timely examination of the period, exploring how Jamaica was shaped, and in turn has shaped, these changing times. Professor Golding weaved a narrative connecting global events to the unique Jamaican experience. He explored the early digital age and the rise of China to a seismic shift in US politics and the COVID-19 pandemic. He dived into the nuances of social change, focusing on LGBTQ+ rights, corruption, and the enduring struggles of racial injustice. Throughout these trying times, the vibrant spirit of Jamaica shines through, further exemplified by the triumphs of its athletes and the resilience of its people. This book was published by the University of Technology, Jamaica Press; this 251-page edition was meticulously crafted into three distinct sections: "New Millennium: Early Digital Life", "Socio-Economic Changes", and "Emerging COVID-19 Era."

Paul Golding is employed at the University of Technology, Jamaica, as a Professor of Management Information Systems, bringing his extensive expertise to this work. He has over fifty journal articles and conference presentations to his credit and is a recognised authority in the field. This book reflects his deep understanding of the interplay between technology, society, and global events.

In the preface, Professor Golding zoomed into the historical context of Jamaica, highlighting overlooked aspects of West Indian history. Elements like financial arrangements surrounding abolishing slavery and the implications for the discussion on repatriation. He raises critical questions about Jamaica's colonial past, calling for further discussion of the nation's identity and future. While Professor Golding does not explicitly state his methodology, the book draws on qualitative historical analysis, social observation, quantitative surveying and economic data to support the book's thematic structure.

ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

Section one explores the impact of the digital revolution in Jamaica. Professor Golding begins by tracing the global deregulation of the telecommunication industry, showing parallels between the forced competition on telecommunication giants like AT&T in the US and the impact it had on Cable and Wireless Jamaica (C&W), leading to the introduction of new players like Digicel and Claro in the market. He further examines the rise of personal computers (PCs), underscoring the roles of brands like Dell and Intel in making technology more accessible. The growth of social media platforms like Facebook and Tick Tock were analysed with a focus on their role in communication, crime, and



cyberbullying. He also explored former US President Donald Trump's Twitter (now X) activities by highlighting the key themes and rhetorical strategies.

The challenges and opportunities presented by increased access to the internet were explored in depth in the book. Professor Golding presents data on Jamaican teenagers' online activities, highlighting concerns such as phone and other electronic device theft, cyberbullying, and the digital divide. He examined the impact of technology on education and advocated for greater integration of digital tools and resources in the classroom. One chapter that stood out was focused on the theft of electricity across the island and the implication for Jamaica Public Company Limited (JPSCo.). The chapter emphasises the need for innovative solutions to address this pervasive issue. The section concluded with a discussion of Industry 4.0 and the efforts of the Jamaican government to promote technological integration in education, including initiatives to support special needs students.

While the chapter provides a much-needed exploration of Jamaica's digital landscape, it could benefit from a more in-depth exploration of specific curriculum changes needed at all levels of education to prepare students for the demands of the 21st century. A more detailed analysis of the potential benefits and challenges of the technological integration of emerging technologies like AI and 3D printing into the education system would further strengthen this section.

Section two looks at the social and economic forces that have shaped Jamaica during the period under review. Professor Golding again provided background on the population censuses and pension system, highlighting the contributions of key figures in their development. He takes the controversial topic of same-gender relationships, acknowledging the position of Jamaica and its stance on being homophobic. He traced the development of Jamaican attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community in Jamaica. He supported his position using statistics conducted at local universities. He noted the persistent negative views of same-gender relationships, contrasting these findings with the growing acceptance and tolerance as well as the passing of legislation in other countries to promote same-sex marriage.

Professor Golding also explores the issue of crime and corruption and its impact on Jamaica. He recounted the famous story of Christopher "Dudus" Coke and his extradition to the US. He examined corruption in business operations by referencing the Press Freedom Rank (PFR) and the Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The fiscal crisis of 2007-2009 was also tied into the discussion and how this impacted Jamaica's economic growth, specifically the rise of Ponzi schemes and the need for greater financial literacy. Professor Golding also dived into the challenges of youth unemployment and China's growing influence on Jamaica's economic development, highlighting the complexities of this



relationship. The section concluded with celebrating Jamaica's achievements on the world stage. From athletics to its progress in literacy rates, it sheds light on these achievements.

The section explored the root cause of homophobia in Jamaica and a more targeted discussion of the potential impact of Chinese investment on the country's long-term economic prospects. The section would have benefitted from using current data for CPI and PFR to enhance the currency of the data. The section failed to mention the foundation athletes like Asafa Powell and Merlene Ottey, who were among the foundation athletes who placed Jamaica's name on the world stage. Credit must be given to those who came before Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Asafa Powell.

The book's concluding section focuses on the unprecedented challenges and transformation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Professor Golding recounted the political landscape up to the time of the pandemic. He analyses the 2016 elections in Jamaica and the US, the efforts of the Jamaican government to implement a National Identification System (NIDS), and the potential benefits and privacy concerns highlighted by Jamaicans slated to use such a system. The book gave a detailed account of the impact of the pandemic and the aftermath, primarily focusing on the economic and social disruptions caused by lockdowns and restrictions and associated restrictions.

Professor Golding explored the rise of misinformation and conspiracy theories surrounding the virus, providing examples of rumours and how they fuel fear and discrimination in Jamaica. He zoomed in on the impact of the pandemic on education by speaking to the challenges of moving classes online and the need for more significant support from teachers and students. The section concluded with a discussion on the global vaccination rollout, particularly on the inequities in access and distribution.

While this chapter addressed the most current issues, such as the pandemic and its impact on Jamaica, it could have been strengthened by explicitly addressing the role of the Data Protection Act of 2020 in providing guardrails for protecting the information stored on NIDS. A more detailed analysis of the long-term implications of the pandemic on various sections, including healthcare, tourism, and more, would have also enhanced this section.

CONCLUSION

In this critical book review, Professor Golding offers a valuable contribution to understanding contemporary Jamaica through analysing history, socioeconomics, and present-day observations. The book successfully captures the dynamism and resilience of the Jamaican people in the face of unprecedented challenges.



While the book provided a durable foundation for further inquiry, there were opportunities for greater depth and specificity. Addressing the points raised in the review, this book can be a powerful catalyst for continued scholarship and informed discussion on Jamaica's challenges and opportunities. Specifically, further research is needed to understand the following:

- The development and implementation of comprehensive technology-focused curriculum changes across all levels of education in Jamaica.
- Explore further the root cause of homophobia in Jamaica and the development of culturally sensitive strategies to promote greater acceptance and inclusion.
- Exploring the potential impact of NIDS and the Data Protection Act of 2020 and its implementation.
- Assessing the long-term impact of COVID-19 on all industries
- The ethical and practical challenges of integrating artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies in the Jamaican workforce.

By addressing the crucial areas of inquiry, scholars and policymakers in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean can contribute to a more informed and targeted understanding of Jamaica's past, present, and future.

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BOLETIM DE CONJUNTURA (BOCA)

Ano VI | Volume 20 | Nº 58 | Boa Vista | 2024

<http://www.ioles.com.br/boca>

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