The year 2000 marked the one-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Puerto Ricans recruited by the Hawaiian Sugar Plantation Association (HSPA) to work on their sugar plantations. This event has been commemorated through a series of official Centennial celebrations that honor the social, cultural, and political contributions of Puerto Ricans to Hawaiian society. Today there are approximately 25,000 Puerto Ricans in Hawai‘i who constitute a numerical minority of 2.3 percent in a population that numbers slightly over a million inhabitants. This journal section is dedicated to the Puerto Ricans in Hawai‘i, con mucho cariño.

A series of events that unfolded within the context of United States imperialist expansion contributed to the migration of workers from Puerto Rico to Hawai‘i. First, Hawai‘i had passed a Chinese Exclusion Act in 1886 in order to prevent Chinese and Japanese workers from entering Hawai‘i because the HSPA feared their potential voting power. As a result the HSPA required alternative sources of labor for their plantations. The annexation of Puerto Rico, Hawai‘i, Guam, and the Philippines by the United States in 1898 facilitated the transfer of Puerto Ricans from one U.S. territory (Puerto Rico) to the other (Hawai‘i). Second, when the 1898 hurricane, San Ciriaco, devastated more than half of the island of Puerto Rico, thousands of Puerto Ricans who had been dependent on subsistence farming found themselves destitute and jobless, and so chose to leave their homeland for better opportunities.
Between 1900 and 1901 eleven migration expeditions took place from Puerto Rico to Hawai'i. In the first migration 114 men, women, and children set out to Hawai'i. Nitza Medina charts the first expedition from Puerto Rico to New Orleans to San Francisco, where approximately half of the group refused to continue the voyage. She shows how in each port some Puerto Ricans tried to escape because of the broken promises and horrendous conditions they encountered on the trip; but they were apprehended by sheriffs or the labor recruiters and forced to continue their trip to Hawai'i. The most numerically significant act of resistance took place at the San Francisco harbor where 56 Puerto Ricans escaped; they formed the foundation for the Puerto Rican community in San Francisco.

Those who escaped displayed an unexpected level of resistance that brought to public attention the horrendous conditions of the trip and the draconian tactics used by the HSPA on immigrants. Not only did many Puerto Ricans refuse to get back on the ship in California, but the first act of protest by those who continued on to Hawai'i was to seize control of the vessel that was to transport them to other islands in Hawai'i because of the way their food was dumped into the cattle troughs on the steamer.

After they arrived in Honolulu these Puerto Ricans were taken to a plantation in Lahaina, Maui. Members of the HSPA were angered by the negative publicity that resulted and by what they considered the audacity of half-starved Puerto Rican peasants to protest their treatment. They
implemented numerous strategies to control them, one of which was to promote an image of Puerto Ricans as aggressive, and stereotyped them as temperamental knife wielders in the local newspaper. The HSPA also exploited existing differences among the various ethnic groups and invested considerable resources in creating and perpetuating animosities among the workers.

These are the conditions that the poet Carlo Mario Fraticelli encountered in Hawai'i when he immigrated to Hawai'i 1901. According to Austin Dias, Fraticelli was one of the most respected voices of the Puerto Rican community. His *d cimas* capture the outrage and disillusionment felt by his Puerto Rican countrymen and women. He passionately described the Puerto Rican experiences on the sugar plantation during the early part of the twentieth century in poems that ranged from calls to rebellion against the oppressive conditions they suffered to expressions of deep yearning for his homeland.

Although, as Dias points out, Hawai'i was a territory of the United States when Fraticelli and other Puerto Ricans immigrated, it was not a democracy. Hawai'i was managed by an oligarchy of five elite families who controlled it as if it were their personal fiefdom. To control the workers they fostered inter-ethnic competition. As Medina indicates, the HSPA intentionally recruited Puerto Ricans as “scabs” to break up the successful union strikes carried out by the Japanese workers in the early part of the twentieth century. To create further animosity, the HSPA deliberately paid Puerto Ricans a slightly higher salary and gave them better living quarters. Throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century the HSPA consistently threatened the Japanese, and workers of other nationalities, with the idea that they would recruit more Puerto Ricans if they protested their working conditions. This tactic successfully intensified inter-ethnic tension between Puerto Ricans and Japanese and other workers. The HSPA also fostered racial privilege by establishing a policy of promoting Portuguese workers to the position of *luna* (foreman) while denying these positions to non-white workers on the plantations.

Before they left their homeland Puerto Rican workers had been promised better wages, bonuses, free medical care, and an education for their children, but when they arrived, they realized that many of these promises would be broken. In contrast to Japanese and Chinese workers, Puerto Ricans did not have a government official in Hawai'i to protect or represent them. They even tried writing to Puerto Rican officials, who forwarded their grievances to Washington to request that this matter be investigated. However, the men in charge were HSPA employees and as a result nothing ever changed.

After annexation in 1898 Congress prohibited contract labor. Thus Puerto Ricans were not subject to the labor contracts that had restricted the movement of earlier immigrants. However, annexation did not stop the sugar plantation owners from attempting to constrain the mobility of Puerto Ricans. One of the ways that planters did this was by agreeing that the laborers could not move from one plantation to another without the planters’ consent. Even though it was difficult, in time some left the plantations to which they had originally been assigned to search for better working conditions, a tactic that infuriated members of the HSPA who were accustomed to ruling over their workers with almost total control. They sought to portray those who stood up for their rights as “temperamental,” and those hard working laborers who moved from one plantation to another were branded as “irresponsible” and even accused of being “lazy.” Other incidents, taken out of context, were used to stereotype Puerto Ricans. Manuel Canales, an 80-year-old man who worked in the sugar plantations, recalls how these stereotypes evolved:
When Puerto Ricans first arrived in Hawai‘i they saw that the Japanese were treated very badly. For example, even when the workers were sick, the foreman would come to their barracks, drag them out of bed, and force them to work. A foreman once tried to do this to a Puerto Rican (huh!). What the foreman didn’t know was that this man slept with his hoe (machete) under his blanket. When the foreman started to pull him out of bed the Puerto Rican pulled out his hoe and the foreman never entered his room again.

Thus, workers resorted to the use of weapons to keep themselves from being systematically manhandled by feudalistic plantation managers and thereby acquired the reputation of being “knife wielders.” As Dias observes, Fraticelli’s *d cimas* are a powerful response to the injustices this generation of Puerto Ricans experienced, and he describes their emotional yearning for social justice as well as their feelings for Puerto Rico.

In 1917 Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens, which changed the status of workers in some respects but not in others. Although U.S. citizenship did not automatically improve their social status or political power, it did grant them certain rights and privileges, such as the right to vote, increased mobility, and more opportunity to obtain other jobs, especially in the defense industry. Initially, the HSPA violated the civil rights of Puerto Ricans by denying them the right to vote even though, as citizens, they were expected to fight in World War I.

Despite the hardships and divisive tactics the multiethnic workforce endured on the plantations, they managed to forge alliances and gain better working conditions. López and Forbes’ paper illustrates how the daily contact and consequent alliances between Puerto Ricans and other ethnic groups on the plantations, among them the Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Hawaiians, Filipinos, and Koreans, led to the development of local culture, a fusion of different ethnic foods, practices, and languages. Pidgin English, for example, was created as the lingua franca to enable communication within the common local culture that grew out of the intense history of labor struggle engaged in by the various groups. They also found that even though each group maintains at least part of its individual ethnic values and traditions, this new local culture has the potential of attenuating distinct ethnic identities, especially among groups such as the Puerto Ricans who represent a small segment of the population. López and Forbes discuss this issue of Puerto Rican identity in the face of emerging global forces. They look at how such intensifying globalization has led to even more social and economic inequality and created an ethnically stratified multicultural society. For example, within Hawai‘i, some ethnic groups such as Puerto Ricans constitute an economically and politically disadvantaged ethnic minority. The López and Forbes’ paper utilizes the concepts of cultural syncretism and cultural synthesis to explain how contemporary Puerto Rican culture and identity are being reconfigured. Employing these concepts they outline the history of the tension in Hawai‘i between ethnic, local, and global cultures and how that dynamic tension continues to influence and shape Puerto Rican identity in Hawai‘i today.