

The Santiago Family Restaurant has been in Westfield, Massachusetts for just over 10 years now. Ishmael Santiago and his wife, Carmen, opened the restaurant and still run it to this day with the rest of their family. They moved from Puerto Rico to the Pioneer Valley in 1967, when Ishmael was just 18 and only a year after their marriage.

Although the Pioneer Valley might seem an odd place to immigrate, the migration of Puerto Ricans to the Valley—mostly Hartford, Springfield, and Holyoke—began as early as the first World War. Their immigration was made possible by the United States, in order to allow them the “privilege” of being drafted for the war, suddenly declaring all Puerto Ricans temporary citizens. Those who weren’t drafted were driven to emigrate by the grim conditions of poverty and starvation in Puerto Rico. They were drawn to the US, and in particular the Valley, by the need for cheap labor in the tobacco farms and mill towns of Massachusetts. As a result of this migration at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the oldest Puerto Rican communities in the United States are in Holyoke and Springfield. The Santiagos and many others simply followed in the footsteps of thousands of Puerto Ricans decades before them.

The cuatro—meaning “four” in Spanish—was originally a four-stringed instrument roughly fashioned in the mountains and hills of Puerto Rico by the Taíno natives, European misfits, and runaway slaves who escaped to the interior starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to get away from the Spanish colonists at the coasts. These peoples formed the social class in Puerto Rico called the jíbaros, who lend their name even today to the style of music they produced.

As the three cultures of the jíbaros combined over the centuries, the Spanish necessity of stringed instruments to perform the Catholic mass remained. The cuatro and other supporting instruments were made to meet this necessity. Traditionally, the cuatro is carved out of a single piece of wood, as this was the only method to produce them in the hills of Puerto Rico. Their original four-strings mimicked the Spanish instruments at the time, and they were tuned identically. The cuatro, however, also found its role outside of the mass in the form of décimas and other strictly rhyming verse forms. It was used to play the melody backing a traditional troubadour’s singing in a musical ensemble.

As Puerto Rico moved into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the jíbaros started to integrate into the Spanish society that had flourished and the towns that were popping up. With the intermixing of these cultures, the jíbaros started to hear the new Spanish sounds of classical guitars and other popular instruments which had gained more strings. Eventually this was translated into the cuatro form we know today with five pairs of ten metal strings, tuned to the same intervals as the classical Spanish guitars that were popular in the 1800s.