

# OSCAR GARCÍA RIVERA, SR.

1900 – 1969



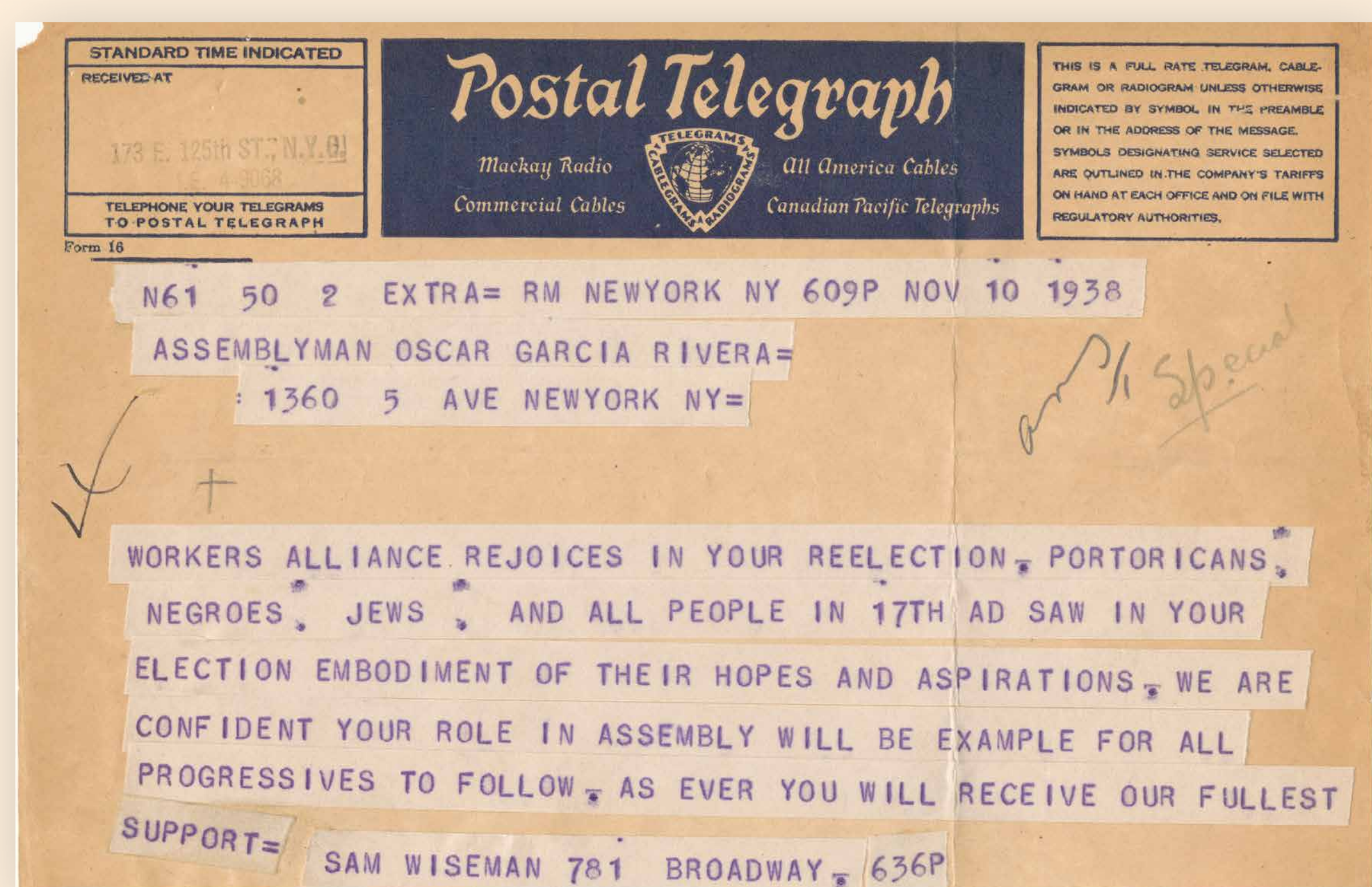
New York State Assemblyman Oscar García Rivera, 1937.  
Courtesy of The Oscar García Rivera Papers. Center for Puerto Rican Studies Library and Archives, Hunter College, CUNY

As the first person of Puerto Rican descent elected to public office in the United States, Oscar García Rivera, Sr. advocated in the New York State Assembly for improved working conditions, child labor laws, and anti-discrimination legislation.

Rivera, Sr. was born in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico to a family that owned a coffee plantation. As a youth in 1917, Rivera and all residents of Puerto Rico were granted U.S. citizenship by an act of Congress and were then eligible to hold public office in the United States for the first time. Rivera excelled in school: he was the valedictorian of his junior high school class and the class president of his high school class, graduating in 1925.

In 1926, Rivera moved to New York City. After working at a factory in Brooklyn, he passed the clerk's examination and was appointed to the City Hall Post Office. There, he became active in the union, urging other Hispanic employees to pursue better pay and work conditions. He earned a law degree in 1930 from St. John's University. Rivera set up a law practice serving the working class and the Puerto Rican community, sometimes pro bono.

In 1937, Rivera, as the Republican candidate, was elected to the New York State Assembly. Rivera was reelected in 1938 and 1939 on the American Labor ticket, after the Republican party refused to re-nominate him. During his term, the Assembly passed his signature Unemployment Insurance Bill.



Telegram on behalf of the Worker's Alliance congratulating Oscar García Rivera on his reelection as Assemblyman, New York, NY, November 10, 1938.  
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