

William 'Bill' Lucy

MODULE 1: Sister Institutions -- CBTU (1972) Meets APRI (1965)

MODULE SNAPSHOT

Grade level	8-12 (adaptable for 6-7)
Time	45 min single class OR 90 min block
Subject fit	U.S. History, Civics, African American Studies, Labor Studies
Co-built with	CBTU Memphis (cbtu.org)

01

Learning Objectives -- Students Will Be Able To:

1. Distinguish between APRI (1965, founded by Randolph + Rustin) and CBTU (1972, founded by Lucy + 4 co-founders) as the two AFL-CIO Black constituency organizations.
2. Explain why Bill Lucy and 1,200 Black trade unionists founded a SECOND constituency body in 1972 -- seven years after APRI already existed.
3. Identify the five co-founders of CBTU and the unions they represented.
4. Analyze the role of William Lucy as a bridge: from 1968 Memphis ('I AM A MAN') to 1972 Chicago (CBTU founding) to 2008 (Obama endorsement).
5. Evaluate how 'two rooms for one fight' (APRI + CBTU) strengthens or complicates Black labor advocacy today.

02

Teacher Background -- 60 Second Brief

By 1972, A. Philip Randolph's APRI had been operating for seven years. It was effective, well-funded, and respected -- but it was an institute, run from the top down with close coordination with AFL-CIO leadership. That coordination became a problem. AFL-CIO President George Meany had refused to address the concerns of Black trade unionists, and the AFL-CIO remained NEUTRAL in the 1972 presidential election even as Richard Nixon's policies drove up unemployment, froze wages, and appointed Supreme Court justices hostile to workers' and minorities' rights. In September 1972, William Lucy (AFSCME Secretary-Treasurer and creator of 'I AM A MAN'), Nelson Edwards (UAW V.P.), Charles Hayes (Amalgamated Meat Cutters V.P.), Cleveland Robinson (President, Distributive Workers), and William Simons (President, AFT Local 6) convened 1,200 Black union officials from 37 unions at the LaSalle Hotel in Chicago. They founded CBTU to fight discrimination 'within the house of labor,' promote Black union leadership, and connect labor to Black communities -- explicitly NOT under AFL-CIO leadership control. Lucy served as CBTU president for 40 years (1972-2013). APRI continued. The two organizations now operate as sister bodies: APRI as the institutional coalition; CBTU as the rank-and-file insurgent organization. Both still exist. In Memphis, APRI Memphis and CBTU Memphis both carry this work today.

03

Primary Source Excerpts

CBTU founding statement, Chicago, September 1972

"Black trade unionists have been ignored within the labor movement. We will no longer wait for permission to speak for ourselves. CBTU is built to fight discrimination within the house of labor."

William Lucy, on creating CBTU (interview, 1980s)

"APRI did what it did. We loved what it did. But there were rooms where rank-and-file Black workers needed a seat -- and the AFL-CIO leadership wasn't opening those doors. So we built the room."

A. Philip Randolph at the 1965 APRI founding

"The civil rights movement must permanently link itself to the labor movement. Otherwise it will not be a movement -- it will be a moment."

William Lucy on Memphis 1968 (Labor Education ebook, Chapter 2)

"I AM A MAN was not a request. It was a declaration. We were telling Memphis -- and America -- that our humanity

was not negotiable."

CBTU mission statement (cbtu.org)

"CBTU is the largest, most respected and most progressive organization of Black trade union men and women in the United States. We address the special concerns of Black workers and their communities through the trade union movement."

04

Discussion Questions -- 5 Essential

1. APRI already existed in 1972. Why did Lucy and the founders feel they needed a SECOND organization rather than just working within APRI?
2. The five CBTU founders represented different unions (AFSCME, UAW, Meat Cutters, Distributive Workers, AFT). Why did multi-union representation matter? What would have changed if CBTU were a single-union body?
3. AFL-CIO President George Meany refused to take a position in the 1972 election. Was that a labor decision, a political decision, or a racial decision? Defend your answer.
4. Today, APRI and CBTU both exist and often cooperate. Are 'two rooms for one fight' a strength or a weakness? Use evidence.
5. What labor or civil rights work in YOUR community would benefit from a CBTU-style rank-and-file approach versus an APRI-style coalition approach?

05

Activity -- 'The Two Rooms' (25 minutes)

Split the class into two groups: APRI delegates (top-down coalition; close to AFL-CIO leadership) and CBTU founders (bottom-up insurgent; convened independently). Each group is given the same hypothetical 2026 problem: 'A major retailer in your city is firing Black warehouse workers for union activity.' Each group has 10 minutes to draft a one-page response strategy. Then each group presents. The class compares: where do the strategies overlap? Where do they diverge? Which would actually win the workers' jobs back? Debrief: real movements use BOTH approaches at the same time. Where do you see APRI and CBTU cooperating today?

06

Assessment -- Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

1. Name the year APRI was founded, the year CBTU was founded, and ONE reason CBTU was needed.
2. Identify William Lucy's three biggest acts: Memphis 1968, Chicago 1972, and a third of your choice.
3. In one sentence: how do APRI and CBTU together protect Black workers?

07

Extensions & Going Deeper

- > Visit cbtu.org -- find the chapter directory. Is there a CBTU chapter in your city? What is it working on?
- > Visit memphisapri.org and cbtu.org side by side. Identify three shared priorities and three where they emphasize different things.
- > Read the full Bill Lucy chapter in the Labor Education ebook (Chapter 2) -- focus on the 1994 PSI presidency and the Free South Africa Movement.
- > Research the other AFL-CIO constituency groups: LCLAA (Latino), APALA (Asian Pacific American), Pride at Work (LGBTQ+), CLUW (women). How do they relate to APRI and CBTU?
- > Interview a current CBTU or APRI member in your area about how the two organizations cooperate locally.
- > Visit laboreducation.org/a-philip-randolph and laboreducation.org/bayard-rustin for the companion curriculum.

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This module honors the elders who paid the way. CBTU national: cbtu.org. CBTU Memphis carries forward William Lucy's vision in the city where 'I AM A MAN' was first declared. Companion modules: laboreducation.org/a-philip-randolph (Randolph + APRI), laboreducation.org/bayard-rustin (Rustin + Memphis 1968).

