

# William 'Bill' Lucy

## MODULE 3: The Free South Africa Movement & Mandela

### MODULE SNAPSHOT

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

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### Learning Objectives -- Students Will Be Able To:

1. Identify the founding of the Free South Africa Movement (FSAM) on November 21, 1984 -- and the four people in the embassy.
2. Explain why a U.S. labor leader (Lucy) co-founded an international anti-apartheid coalition.
3. Trace the FSAM strategy: rolling arrests at the embassy + university divestment + congressional pressure.
4. Analyze how Lucy used CBTU and AFSCME networks to escalate the campaign into federal sanctions (1986 Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act).
5. Evaluate the labor movement as an international human-rights actor -- not just a domestic one.

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### Teacher Background -- 60 Second Brief

On November 21, 1984, four people walked into the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C., asking to meet with the ambassador. They were Randall Robinson (TransAfrica), Mary Frances Berry (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights), Walter Fauntroy (D.C. Delegate to Congress), and William Lucy. They refused to leave until apartheid ended. Three were arrested. Lucy and Robinson stayed on the outside to coordinate. That moment launched the Free South Africa Movement -- a U.S.-based coalition that combined daily arrests at the embassy, university divestment campaigns, congressional lobbying, and grassroots organizing through Black churches and unions. Lucy used CBTU's national chapter network and AFSCME's 1.4 million members to keep pressure on for years. In 1986, Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act over President Reagan's veto -- imposing sanctions on South Africa. After Nelson Mandela's release from prison on February 11, 1990, it was Lucy who led the U.S. tour that brought Mandela to American cities. Lucy later served on the AFL-CIO delegation that monitored South Africa's first democratic post-apartheid elections in 1994 -- witnessing Mandela become the nation's first Black president. This is what U.S. labor looks like as an international solidarity actor.

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### Primary Source Excerpts

#### Free South Africa Movement founding statement, Nov 21, 1984

*"We are here today because human dignity does not stop at a border. The system of apartheid is a labor system, a racial system, and a moral catastrophe. We will not leave."*

**William Lucy, on FSAM (Labor Education ebook, Chapter 2)**

*"Apartheid was a labor system. Black South African workers were locked out of skilled jobs, of housing, of unions, of education. We knew that system. We had fought it here. We had to fight it there."*

**Nelson Mandela on U.S. labor's role (1990 U.S. tour)**

*"You stood with us when we had no voice. You opened your union halls, your churches, your campuses. We are free in part because organized labor refused to look away."*

**Mary Frances Berry, on the embassy action**

*"We expected to be ignored. We did not expect a movement. But Bill Lucy made sure it became one -- because he had the union network to keep it going."*

**Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, 1986 (excerpt)**

*"The Congress finds that the system of apartheid in South Africa is abhorrent and that the United States must take immediate action to end it through sanctions."*

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### Discussion Questions -- 5 Essential

1. Why did Lucy frame apartheid as 'a labor system'? What does that framing make visible that a 'civil rights' framing alone might miss?
2. FSAM used rolling arrests at the embassy for over a year. Why was that tactic effective? What did it cost? What did it teach?
3. Lucy used CBTU and AFSCME networks to sustain the campaign. Why is having an INFRASTRUCTURE -- not just outrage -- essential to long campaigns?
4. Congress passed the 1986 Anti-Apartheid Act OVER Reagan's veto. What does that tell us about the power of organized labor + civil rights working together politically?
5. Today, where in the world would you want U.S. organized labor to apply the FSAM playbook? Why?

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### Activity -- 'Solidarity Across Borders' (25 minutes)

In groups of 3-4, students design a 2026 international labor-solidarity campaign for a specific country and issue (e.g., garment workers in Bangladesh, miners in the DRC, agricultural workers in the Gulf states, journalists in Myanmar). Each group has 15 minutes to draft: (a) a one-line solidarity statement, (b) three tactics modeled on FSAM (e.g., embassy presence, divestment target, congressional ask), (c) which U.S. unions or constituency groups they would mobilize. Groups present in 2 minutes. Class discusses: which campaign feels most actionable and why?

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### Assessment -- Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

1. Name the four founders of FSAM and the date they entered the embassy.
2. In one sentence: why was Lucy specifically important to making FSAM more than a moment?
3. Name one 2026 international issue where you'd want U.S. labor to act as a solidarity partner. Why?

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### Extensions & Going Deeper

- > Read Randall Robinson's 'Defending the Spirit' or Mary Frances Berry's 'And Justice for All' for the FSAM founders' own accounts.
- > Watch documentary footage of Mandela's 1990 U.S. tour -- look for the union halls and AFL-CIO addresses on the itinerary.
- > Research a current divestment campaign at a U.S. university. What's the FSAM influence on its tactics?
- > Interview an AFSCME member or CBTU chapter about labor's international solidarity work today.
- > Compare FSAM to the contemporary BDS movement -- what's the same, what's different?

### CO-BUILT BY LABOR EDUCATION x CBTU MEMPHIS

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

