

A. Philip Randolph

MODULE 6: Sister Institutions -- APRI (1965) Meets CBTU (1972)

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	APRI Memphis -- memphispari.org

01

Learning Objectives -- Students Will Be Able To:

1. Distinguish between APRI (founded 1965 by Randolph + Rustin) and CBTU (founded 1972 by William 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 organization in 1972 -- seven years after APRI already existed.
3. Identify William Lucy as the bridge from Memphis 1968 ('I AM A MAN') to Chicago 1972 (CBTU founding).
4. Analyze the strategic difference between APRI (top-down coalition) and CBTU (bottom-up insurgent body) within the same labor movement.
5. Evaluate how APRI Memphis and CBTU Memphis can BOTH operate in the same city today as sister chapters.

02

Teacher Background -- 60 Second Brief

By 1972, Randolph's APRI had been operating for seven years. It was effective and respected -- but it was an institute coordinated closely with AFL-CIO leadership. That became a problem. AFL-CIO President George Meany had refused to address the concerns of Black trade unionists and remained NEUTRAL in the 1972 presidential election even as Richard Nixon's policies drove up unemployment and appointed Supreme Court justices hostile to workers and minorities. In September 1972, William Lucy -- AFSCME Secretary-Treasurer and the man who created 'I AM A MAN' in Memphis 1968 -- convened 1,200 Black union officials from 37 unions at the LaSalle Hotel in Chicago. The largest assembly of Black trade unionists in U.S. labor history. Lucy and four co-founders (Nelson Edwards of the UAW, Charles Hayes of the Meat Cutters, Cleveland Robinson of Distributive Workers, William Simons of AFT Local 6) founded the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU). They built CBTU to fight discrimination 'within the house of labor' -- explicitly NOT under AFL-CIO leadership control. Lucy served as CBTU president for 40 years (1972-2013). APRI continued. The two bodies now operate as sister organizations: APRI as the institutional coalition; CBTU as the rank-and-file expansion. In Memphis, APRI Memphis and CBTU Memphis both carry this work today.

03

Primary Source Excerpts

A. Philip Randolph at APRI's founding, 1965

"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 creating CBTU (interview)

"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."

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."

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 (cbitu.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. Trace the lineage: Randolph (BSCP 1925) -> Randolph + Rustin (APRI 1965) -> Lucy (Memphis 1968) -> Lucy (CBTU 1972). What's transmitted at each handoff?
2. APRI already existed in 1972. Why did Lucy feel a SECOND organization was needed instead of just working through APRI?
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. CBTU's founders represented FIVE different unions. Why did multi-union representation matter? What would have changed if CBTU were a single-union body?
5. If APRI Memphis and CBTU Memphis both work in the same city today, what should they do TOGETHER -- and what should they keep separate?

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 of leadership). Each group receives the same hypothetical problem: 'A major employer in your city is firing Black workers for union activity.' Each group has 10 minutes to draft a one-page response strategy. Each presents in 3 minutes. 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 simultaneously. Identify ONE current campaign (e.g., the 2026 Novel Bookstore Memphis fight) where you'd want both APRI and CBTU at the table.

06

Assessment -- Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

1. In one sentence: what does CBTU do that APRI doesn't -- and vice versa?
2. Name the year APRI was founded, the year CBTU was founded, and Bill Lucy's role in EACH.
3. If you were starting a Black trade unionist body in 2026, which model would you copy: APRI's, CBTU's, or a hybrid? Why?

07

Extensions & Going Deeper

- > Visit laboreducation.org/bill-lucy -- the companion page dedicated to William Lucy and CBTU's founding.
- > Visit memphispari.org and cbtu.org side by side. Identify three shared priorities and three differences in emphasis.
- > Research the other AFL-CIO constituency groups: LCLAA (Latino), APALA (Asian Pacific American), Pride at Work (LGBTQ+), CLUW (women). How are they similar to APRI/CBTU?
- > Read the Labor Education ebook, Chapter 2 -- focus on Lucy's 1994 election as PSI President and the Free South Africa Movement.
- > Compare Randolph's 1941 March (threatened, won EO 8802) with Lucy's 1972 CBTU founding (executed, built an institution). Both used mass assembly. What changed in 31 years?

CO-BUILT BY LABOR EDUCATION x APRI MEMPHIS

This module is part of a five-module curriculum co-built with APRI Memphis (memphispari.org). Educators using this material -- please send feedback. Membership: memphispari.org/membership. Contact: info@memphisapri.org | (901) 205-9160. The companion module on Bayard Rustin and Memphis 1968 is at laboreducation.org/bayard-rustin.

"Equality is the heart and essence of democracy." -- A. Philip Randolph
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