

Black Panthers evoke emotions 40 years later

By Brandon Perry
THE INDIANAPOLIS RECORDER

INDIANAPOLIS, Indiana — This year marks the 40th anniversary of the formation of the Black Panther Party, an organization that pushed the limits on what steps blacks can take to protect themselves, achieve civil rights and become self-sufficient in their own communities.

As surviving Black Panther leaders prepare gatherings to share the nostalgia of their accomplishments and reminisce about members lost in the struggle, they are making it clear that the best way activists today can honor their legacy is to seriously address the latest set of challenges being faced by African Americans, and humanity in general.

In a recent statement the Dr. Huey P.

Newton Foundation, the organization that currently represents many of the original Black Panthers, noted that in some aspects, conditions for African Americans are worse today than they were in the '60s.

"Blacks in the main continue to live in poverty," the statement reads. "Disproportionate percentages of blacks die from AIDS and cancer, as the black infant mortality rate continues to be double that of whites. There is a desperate need for liberation agenda."

There are still many people who would argue that an organization like the Black Panthers would be best suited to find solutions to those problems.

Originally named the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the organization was formed

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their apparently militaristic group.

The residents said FBI agents spent several hours in the neighborhood showing photos of the suspects and seeking information. They said the men, who appeared to be in their teens or 20s, had lived in the area about a year.

The men slept in the warehouse, said Tashawn Rose, 29. "They would come out late at night and exercise. It seemed like a military boot camp that they were working on there. They would come out and stand guard."

She talked to one of the men about a month ago. "They seemed brainwashed. They said they had given their lives to Allah."

Rose said the men tried to recruit her younger brother and nephew for a karate class. "It was weird," she said.

Benjamin Williams, 17, said the group had young children with them some-

times. Sometimes, he added, the men "would cover their faces. Sometimes they would wear things on their heads, like turbans."

Xavier Smith, who attends the nearby United Christian Outreach, said the men would often come by the church and ask for water.

"They were very private," said Smith, 33. "They spoke with like an accent, sort of a Jamaican accent."

The 110-floor Sears Tower is the nation's tallest building. Security was ramped up after the Sept. 11 attacks, and the 103rd-floor skydeck was closed for about a month and a half.

A spokesman for Gov. Rod Blagojevich said Illinois officials had been in contact with the FBI about the arrests and the investigation. He would not comment further, referring additional questions to the FBI.

The FBI's headquarters in Miami sits near a residential neighborhood just east of

Interstate 95.

A huge crowd — up to 250,000 people — was expected downtown Friday for a parade to honor the NBA champion Miami Heat. Security measures consistent with such an event were in place, city officials said, and the raids were not expected to affect it.

Several terrorism investigations have had south Florida links. Several of the Sept. 11 hijackers lived and trained in the area, including ringleader Mohamed Atta, and several plots by Cuban-Americans against Fidel Castro's government have been based in Miami.

Jose Padilla, a former resident once accused of plotting to detonate a radioactive bomb in the U.S., is charged in Miami with being part of a support cell for Islamic extremists. Padilla's trial is set for this fall.

Associated Press reporter Mark Sherman in Washington, D.C., contributed to this article.

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