black neighborhoods, observing police conduct and protecting residents from acts of police brutality. Originally named the Black Panther Party For Self-Defense, the organization started in Oakland, Calif. Party founders Bobby Seale and the late Huey P. Newton eventually turned the group into a quasi-militant political organization, calling for blacks to take up arms in response to police brutality and racism. One of their founding principles included preventing blacks from entering the draft through non-violent actions.

"They considered themselves armed revolutionaries," said John Holmes, SIUC lecturer in Black American Studies, who helped the Panthers — as they called themselves — establish a free breakfast program at the Olivet Free Church. It was one of many community-based programs started by the National Black Panthers, which also helped organize the Black Studies Program in 1968.

At their core, the Panthers fought against police brutality — sometimes at the risk of their lives. Donning black leather jackets, dark sunglasses and black berets, the Panthers had a formidable, and some say threatening, presence. Their membership exceeded 2,000 with party chapters in several major cities. The group attracted mostly young black men and women.

There was no official chapter in Carbondale. But some SIUC students from Chicago and St. Louis started their own organization in town that was heavily influenced by the party. The National Committee to Combat Fascism, founded in 1967, had members in Carbondale as early as 1969. Local members included 20-year-old students from Chicago and St. Louis. The group loosely affiliated themselves with the national party.

"Some of them were students of mine," Holmes said. "They were taking Black Studies classes when it was housed in the Old Baptist building. I had all sorts of literature and magazines; Mohammed Speaks — the National Black Panther Newspaper and the Chicago Defender, the group's discussion groups."

The NCCF, whose membership was sporadic, had an office on the corner of North Washington and Oak Street. Some members of the group lived upstairs in a house at 401 N. Washington St. near Green Street. The group did not organize on campus, instead focusing on the surrounding community. In addition to creating community programs, the group sold Panther newspapers and other propaganda. They encouraged young people to arm themselves, which often fell on deaf ears, according to Holmes.

"They were teaching these young people how to use weapons and were preaching things like people need to arm themselves. I took some of the guys to the homes of people I knew who hunted and had weapons. I wasn't for attacking the police, or to defend themselves from the police, but to arm themselves, which often fell on deaf ears, according to Holmes.

That fact did not stop the Panthers from agitating the community and police. Echoing the national party's doctrine, they often referred to the police as "pigs" and accused them of using streetlights to maintain surveillance on the "oppressed population." In Carbondale, despite the police's earlier petition to have streetlights put in, the streetlights remained in place, causing harassment or overt tension among many black residents.

Whether NCCF members Jackson, Dotson or others were involved in streetlight shootings is uncertain. Still, these acts would undoubtedly have attracted more attention from the local police. Police would then deny giving any extraneous surveillance of the group, or of having any knowledge the