Blacks stage march to BR

It was like a flashback to the 1960's. In June, a determined group walked 250 miles to Baton Rouge in a civil rights march to encourage black voter registration.

The group was headed by A.Z. Young, who led Louisiana's first large civil rights march in 1967. But black leaders won't know for months whether the march fulfilled its purpose: getting 350,000 blacks to register to vote, preferably against President Reagan.

At present, blacks make up roughly one-third of Louisiana's 4 million residents. Thirty-six percent of the live below the poverty level, 27 percent don't have an education and 18 percent are jobless in a state where the overall unemployment rate is 11.5 percent.

"It's very lonely in Baton Rouge," said Rep. Richard Turnley, one of 11 blacks in the 105-member House of Representatives. "The only way to change that is to register."

To spark interest in the march, which got very little initial attention, a documentary about it will be aired Sept. 1 by Louisiana Public Broadcasting.

In the program, Turnley tells a group of young blacks that the days of getting preferential treatment from elected officials are gone.

"When Ronald Reagan was elected, white folks were saying to us, 'We are going to take this country back, and you are going to have to fight for whatever you get,'" he said.

Another legislator, Rep. Joe Delpit of Baton Rouge, waved his registration card as he addressed a church gathering in Mansura during the march: "This card gave me membership to be able to get on God's freedom train. This will not get you totally into heaven but I do believe it will help you stay out of hell."

The real message, Delpit said in an interview, is that a past generation of blacks obtained the right for today's young blacks to register. "Now, it's up to the young people to take advantage of it," he said.