Booker T Washington and W.E.B DuBois offered different strategies for dealing with the problems faced by black Americans at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Although both men hoped to eventually achieve the same goals – social, political and economic equality for blacks – their proposed methods of achieving these aims were contradictory.

Washington’s basic philosophy was to work within the system and gain economic strength. He urged blacks to first achieve economic power through education in industrial areas, believing that with economic equality came the power to bring social and political freedoms as well. In 1860 and 1920, the percentage of blacks enrolled (ages 15-19) in school increased from zero to fifty percent. The literacy rate rose by thirty percent between 1890 and 1910.

In his concessions to white Americans, in the Atlanta Compromise, Washington urged blacks to have patience and to gain self-respect through material progress. “No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized” he stated. Washington recognized the resistance that white America instinctively felt toward any form of radical racial reforms.

W.E.B DuBois stood in sharp contrast to Washington’s attempts at working within the system. DuBois looked at the inequalities of American society and felt that the situation could not stand patience and foresight. The fact that millions of them were denied the right to vote, that six times as many black men were lynched per year than white men, that black men and women were being suppressed in society from drinking fountains to the press, caused DuBois to demand that blacks stand up for their equal rights. He stated that economic progress meant nothing without three things: black suffrage, civic equality, and equal education for youth. He urged blacks to complain and make their voices heard. These were the foundations for the Niagara Movement, which would later become the N.A.A.C.P.

DuBois felt his actions were justified in that he had the right to be angry. Blacks deserved immediate social, political, and economic freedoms. However, these measures were not so easily achieved at the time, and many felt DuBois may have gotten a lot farther with Washington’s patience. Washington also had something else that DuBois did not. He had been born a slave, grew up a slave, and was more attuned to what the situation was for blacks, particularly in the south. He gained an education at Hampton Institute and eventually was chosen to establish and head what is today Tuskegee University. DuBois, on the other hand, was born free, after the civil war, in the state of Massachusetts. He had the benefit of a Harvard education, and wrote widely on the question of civil rights at the turn of the century. Eventually, he grew frustrated with white America and left to live in Africa.

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| WASHINTON | DUBOIS |
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In a paragraph, answer the following: Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Dubois had conflicting views of civil rights around the turn of the 20th century. After reading, compare the views of both men. Which point of view do you support and why? Write a paragraph to explain your thoughts.

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