

Reconstruction**Social Studies Skills****Recognizing Bias****LEARN THE SKILL**

Bias is a point of view that is slanted by personal or political beliefs. Bias that appears in primary sources provides clues about an author's intent or background. For example, the author may be trying to justify an action or sway an opinion. By recognizing the biases present in several accounts of the same event, a historian can develop a more balanced analysis of the event. The following strategies are useful to historians in recognizing bias.

- Identify the document to determine if it is a primary source.
- Examine the author's point of view.
- Consider the author's goal in presenting his or her point of view.
- Compare the primary source with other sources and historical evidence, looking for similarities and differences.
- Ask yourself how the primary source would be useful in creating a historical account of the event it covers.

PRACTICE THE SKILL

Use the strategies above to analyze the following passage, then answer the questions that follow.

What is Negro equality, about which so much is said by knaves [fools] and some of which is believed by men who are not fools? It means, as understood by honest Republicans, just this much, and no more: every man, no matter what his race or color; every earthly being who has an immortal soul, has an equal right to justice, honesty, and fair play with every other man; and the law should secure him those rights. The same law which condemns or acquits an African should condemn or acquit a white man.

—Thaddeus Stevens, Speech to Congress, January 3, 1867

1. Who is the author?

2. What is his point of view?

3. What is his goal in making this statement?

APPLY THE SKILL

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph explaining how a historian could use this statement in preparing a historical account of the passage of the Reconstruction Acts.