

Selecting Credible Sources: Secondary Sources

What is it? A **secondary source** is a record created by someone who did not personally experience the event described. Examples of secondary sources include encyclopedias, almanacs, biographies, and textbooks.

How to do it. To select a secondary source that is **credible**, or believable, you must ask questions about the source.

- Who is the author? What is the author's background? What else has the author written? Does the author belong to a group with a certain point of view?
- How recently was the source created or updated? If it was created long ago, where could you look for more recent sources?
- Why was the source created? Is it meant to give facts or to explain what happened? Does it try to persuade you to see things a certain way?

Try it. Suppose that you are researching this question: *What was everyday life like for enslaved Africans in the American colonies?* Consider the following secondary sources, and complete the table. Tell what you would like to know further about each source.

1. *Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South*, by Carl Bridenbaugh, 1952. Bridenbaugh was a professor of American history at the University of California, Berkeley, and at Brown University.
2. *Resource Guide: Slavery*, on Digital History, a U.S. history Web site developed and maintained by the University of Houston, updated December 2005
3. *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, published anonymously in 1839. Written by Theodore Dwight Weld, an antislavery activist.
4. *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South*, edited by Eric L. McKittrick, 1963. A collection of proslavery writings from the mid-1800s.

Source	Author	Date	Purpose	What else would you like to know about the source?
1	C. Bridenbaugh	1952	To explain and teach	What else has he written? Are any of his books more recent than 1952?
2				
3				
4				