

Tobacco farms began spreading along the James River. This established the pattern for the entire Chesapeake Bay—the region’s many rivers allowed planters to ship their crops directly to England.

To attract settlers, the Virginia Company offered a **headright**, a 50-acre land grant for anyone who could pay his or her way to the colony. Those who could not afford passage to America often became **indentured servants**. These men and women agreed to work without pay for a landlord if the landlord paid for their passage to America. After they had served for the time specified in the contract—usually about 4 to 6 years—the landlord restored their freedom.

In 1619 the first Africans arrived in Jamestown. It is not known whether they arrived as indentured servants or as enslaved workers. In the colony’s first decades, planters relied more on European indentured servants. Slavery did not become widespread until the late 1600s.

**The House of Burgesses Is Formed** Settlers soon became frustrated at the lack of self government. So the Virginia Company decided that burgesses, or elected representatives, would meet once a year. The **House of Burgesses**, created in 1619, was the first representative assembly in the colonies.

The House of Burgesses had the authority to pass local laws and to raise taxes. Throughout the colonial period, the power of a local government to raise taxes remained a closely guarded right.



## CONNECT *Citizenship and History*

### VOTING RIGHTS

The creation of the Virginia House of Burgesses did not establish democracy in the modern sense—only male landowners had the right to vote. But it was a step in a long process that gradually extended voting rights to larger and larger sections of the population.

Today, all citizens aged 18 and over have the right to vote. But in order to vote, citizens must first register. This can be done by mail, in person, or in some states, at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Information about voter registration can also be found on the “Rock the Vote” website. Rock the Vote aims to boost voter turnout. Kids who are too young to vote can still participate in America’s democracy by educating others.



### Activity

#### Contribute to Voter Education!

- 1 Let your parents and older relatives know how they can register to vote.
- 2 As local elections are due, work with your classmates to make signs informing people how to register to vote. Display these signs in public places.
- 3 With a parent or older relative, speak to people in your neighborhood about the importance of registering to vote.
- 4 Go to the “Rock the Vote” website and send the link via email to people you know.



See *Citizenship Handbook*, page 303.