

**Land, Wealth, and Rights** Cheap farmland and abundant natural resources gave colonists a chance to prosper. There was less opportunity in Europe. In England, less than 5 percent of the population owned land. In fact, land rarely went up for sale. By contrast, in the early colonies, land was plentiful—once Native Americans were forced to give up their claims.

Land ownership gave colonists political rights as well as prosperity. In rural areas, only white male property owners could vote. City dwellers could vote by paying a fee. However, because so many colonists owned land, more Americans had the right to vote than did their British counterparts. In its wider democracy, colonial America was becoming a new kind of society.

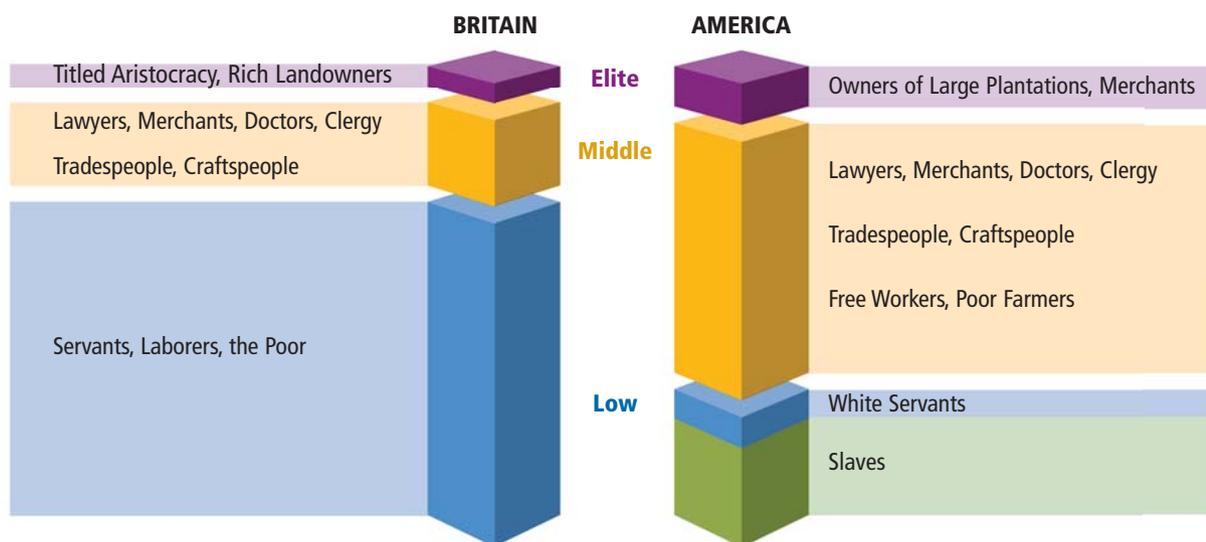
**Social Mobility** More widespread land ownership also gave a different shape to the American class system. As in Europe, people were divided into high, middle, and low ranks. Large landholders and their families were high in rank. Owners of small farms were of middle rank. Landless servants or hired workers were low in rank. But America was unique because it had

- no titled aristocracy
- a large middle class
- a huge underclass of slaves

## COMPARING Class Systems

### BRITAIN AND THE AMERICAN COLONIES

Conditions in America created a class system very different from the ancient and rigid class system of Britain. In the diagram below, compare the size of the British and the colonial middle class.



#### CRITICAL THINKING

- 1. Compare and Contrast** What differences do you notice between the two diagrams?
- 2. Make Inferences** What do the diagrams reveal about social mobility in the colonies?