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“[T]heir dear Idol ye Charter”: The Second Charter of Massachusetts Bay

By

Richard A. Cook, Jr.

Doctor of Philosophy

History

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An abstract of

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**Abstract**

“[T]heir dear Idol ye Charter”: The Second Charter of Massachusetts Bay

By Richard A. Cook, Jr.

This dissertation is a history of the Second Charter of Massachusetts Bay. It compares the Second Charter with previous colonial governments, and outlines the history of the institutions created by the Second Charter. The contests in the early eighteenth century (roughly 1690 to 1750) over the meaning of Second Charter clauses, and over the limits of royal and provincial authority, took on a constitutional character. Those debates tended to involve competing analyses of the text of the Second Charter, and challenges, both provincial and royal, to the language and intent of the document.

As a history of the second charter, it traces the Second Charter’s origins, significance, and ultimate eclipse at the time of the Revolution.  It argues that the Second Charter was a true provincial constitution, and that the colonists as well as the Crown viewed it as such. They behaved as though its strictures were, if not sacrosanct, then at least possessed of a veneer of inviolability. While the outlines of its language and intent could be negotiated, contested, and occasionally circumnavigated, the text of the Second Charter mapped the essential political geography of the imperial relationship. Intended by the Crown to be an outline of the limits of provincial power, it had become a document that circumscribed royal authority as well. Through creative interpretations of the text, both the Crown and the provincials had transformed the document from a concession of royal power to a constitution. When, in the Revolutionary crisis, England appeared to be trampling on the constitutional understanding, the provincials had reason to reconsider their position in the English empire.

“[T]heir dear Idol ye Charter”: The Second Charter of Massachusetts Bay

By

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M.A., History, 2006

Advisor: Dr. John T. Juricek

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