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Adrian Chastain Weimer’s *A Constitutional Culture: New England and the Struggle against Arbitrary Rule in the Restoration Empire* tells a captivating story of division, resistance, and the charter-based allegiance of New England’s colonists to the newly restored Stuart Crown in the 1660s. As rumors flew across the Atlantic with news of Charles II and his authoritarian policies, Massachusetts Bay magistrates and colonial leaders struggled to articulate their loyalty to the new regime while also holding fast to their local liberties, institutions, and Puritan ways of life. Colonial New England’s presentation of itself as a constitutional culture, as the author thoroughly argues, emphasized a principled local authority that was “enriched by a wide range of political, artistic, religious, and historical forms” upheld by the colonial charters (p. 3). Laborious negotiations between the English colonies and the Crown in the early years of the Restoration era took place in many forms, but most of the procedural discourse played out in local courts and public spheres between the Bay magistrates and the royal commissioners. While detailing this historical conflict, this book follows a general chronological order with each chapter dedicated uniquely to a deeply rooted theme of New England’s cultural resistance.

The demands of the Stuart regime caused both crisis and confusion within the English colonies. Puritan magistrates quickly debated how to clarify their political allegiance to the Crown and reinforce their established liberties and charters. The first chapter sets the stage with the struggle of New England towns in reconciling their Puritan beliefs with the execution of Charles I while protecting those involved in the regicide for their Puritan faith. Popularized prodigy literature and newsletters that circulated among church communities fueled colonial sentiments of divine judgment and their need for new political reforms, discussed in chapter 2. While the magistrates disputed their response to the new regime, as detailed in the third chapter, the colonists hoped to show their loyalty and promotion of the king’s rule but emphasized their religious liberties of
worship, authority of their civil courts, and their commercial freedoms based on the colonial charters. The fourth chapter examines how the Puritan churches organized fast days with services that acted as examples of religious resistance and stressed their ecclesiological convictions and beliefs in self-governance. By emphasizing narratives of both colonial leadership and the general populace, Weimer strongly conveys to the reader the ideological conflict of New England in an articulate and understandable approach.

Royalists voiced concerns on both sides of the Atlantic against the Bay magistrates and their seeming dismissal of the Crown's authority. To acquire more detailed information and raise support for the Crown in New England, Charles II sent four armed frigates to Boston with four royal commissioners to analyze the colonies. The fifth chapter shows how the Crown's agents, while limited in their authority within New England, were expected to promote the Crown's "high regard" for his colonies, gather information on colonial loyalties and dissidence, enforce treaties with Native Americans, and surmise goods and resources serviceable for the royal military (p. 113). In the sixth chapter, Weimer argues that many English towns, however, created colony-wide petitions, fearing a duplicitous royal agenda to usurp the authority of the Bay's General Court and install new religious regulations in line with the Church of England. Although many of the accounts emphasize nonconformist sources in shaping a constitutional culture, the author balances her argument well by incorporating counter perspectives that criticized the leadership of the Bay colony. Chapter 7 highlights a few groups who were sympathetic to the royalist agendas within the neighboring colonies, which the royal commissioners hoped might pressure the Bay colony into a weaker, subservient position. However, the support they garnered in the southern colonies from both English and Native communities was not influential enough to displace the well-grounded, popular reliance on charter principles.

With the intent of the royal commissioners made publicly clear, colonial leaders embraced a more proactive strategy of resistance against arbitrary rule. Conflict increased, as Weimer shows in the eighth chapter, as Bay magistrates drafted objections against the civil and religious changes demanded by the royal commissioners in contradiction of their established colonial charter, which the agents of the Crown claimed were arguments of sedition. In the peripheries of the Bay colony's influence, the colonies of Maine and New Hampshire were divided more deeply over the royal commissioners' designs for royal governmental oversight and high church institutions, yet some Puritan support and constitutional resistance remained active. Chapter 9 points to how the Bay magistrates pursued the commissioners to uproot their cause and to dismiss any notion of a royalist occupation and successfully helped to discredit the royal commissioners' power and authority. After sending another letter to London asserting New England's allegiance to the Crown based on their charter, Charles II claimed that their pronouncements derailed his authority over the colonies and demanded that they send agents to renegotiate the Bay charter. The tenth chapter builds in suspense as New England's leadership, with both nonconformists and royalists in high debate, contemplated how to respond to the Crown's requests. In doubling down on their constitutional convictions, the Bay leaders risked sending two masts instead of negotiators as a sign of their allegiance while also declaring their values of constitutional rule.

The wager, occurring in the middle of the Anglo-Dutch war, was successful. The Stuart king was willing to accept the masts as a gift from his colonial subjects, but it only pacified the situation for a short time. The final chapter in the book argues that the abolition of the Massachusetts Bay charter in 1684, the establishment of Edmund An-
dros as the royal governor, and the eventual arrest of Andros in 1689 were the slowly paved outcomes of a thoroughly developed and deeply codified constitutional culture in New England society. Weimer constructs a clear, resolute perspective of colonial resistance through the Restoration era that is both compelling and comprehensive. Her familiarity with the sources and historiography is evident in the well-crafted, detail-rich story of this very impressive work.

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