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Sources and Interpretations

Contesting the Declaration of Independence:

John Lind's "Outlines of a Counter-Declaration" (1776)

By David Armitage

This article prints for the first time since 1776 a proposed British rebuttal of the U.S. Declaration of Independence entitled "Outlines of a Counter-Declaration." This document exists in a unique printed copy of *An Answer to the Declaration of the American Congress* (1776) held by the John Carter Brown Library and it has attracted little scholarly attention and no commentary since it was first printed in 1776. The article provides new information about the printing, publication, sources, context, and content of the "Counter-Declaration" and locates it especially within the oeuvre of its author, the lawyer and pamphleteer John Lind (1737–81), and in the contemporary diplomatic genre of a "counter-declaration." It also shows the salience of the first Partition of Poland (1772) for the American Revolution; the wider European setting necessary for understanding for those events; and the need to return the Declaration of Independence to the competitive and contested political and diplomatic environment from which it arose and into which it was injected in July 1776. The piece presents a transcript of the "Outlines of a Counter-Declaration" along with footnotes explaining its historical references and linking its arguments to contemporary documents from Britain and from American loyalists.