Prior to 1750, the British and Spanish cultural and economic responses to the Indians of North America, though different in detail, were similar in effect. Each in its own way destroyed the native way of life. An analysis of these shall make this apparent.

The British economic response to the Indians of North America had many aspects, including the introduction of corn as a staple crop and special agricultural tricks. When the British Puritans landed in North America, they were taught by the Indians the system of The Three Sisters: planting squash, corn, and beans together, thereby making optimal use of the soil’s nutrients. The Indians also taught them the trick of planting fish with seeds, so that the nutrients in the fish would be absorbed by the soil and encourage a bountiful crop. These changes in agricultural technique made possible not only the survival of the colonists during the first years of the settlement but the permanence and stability of the settlement as the colonists began to support themselves. In many places along the coast, the Indians aided the colonists with gifts of both food and skills.

The British cultural response to the Indians, however, was one of disdain and distrust. How could this be after the Indians had been so friendly and helpful? There are two parts to the answer. The first is actually part of the economic response, and that is the fact that, to the colonists, the Indians could easily be taken advantage of. Many valuable things could be obtained from them for the price of a few beads. Their apparently lesser intelligence made it easy to look down on them. Also, in the southern colonies, the Indians were drafted as slave laborers in the early days of the settlements. The other part of the answer is that many tribes, especially when their lands were encroached upon, made war on the newcomers. Frequent conflicts with the Indians, such as the Pequot War, encouraged distrust of the natives in the colonists across the colonies.

The Spanish economic response to the Indians of North America was more forceful than that of the British. Having come in search of riches, Spanish explorers like De Soto and Coronado set about conquering the areas they explored and subjugating the natives. Spanish government was set up over Indian villages, and Indians were forced to act as laborers in the mines and plantations set up by the Spanish. The Spanish also did what they could to make Spanish culture that of the Indians. One reason for this is that as a Spanish people they would be easier to control than as an entirely different race. Spanish language, religion, and customs were taught to the Indians in an effort to “Spanish-ize” them.

So far as a cultural response to the Indians, the Spanish, like the British, looked down on them. They do not seem to have had the same distrust of them as the British, however, which is probably because of the easy Spanish victories over the Indians, and the relative peace in which the areas existed afterwards.

Overall, in the years of settlement before 1750, the Spanish and the British both responded economically to the Indians by taking advantage of them, whether as inexperienced businessmen or as slaves. Their cultural responses too were reminiscent of each other, sharing a view of the Indians as inferiors. These characteristics show the similarity of the responses of the two groups.