

Can We Learn About Climate Change Adaptation Efforts Today From Historical Lessons from 500 Years Ago? | 1

I am married to an economic historian and I have co-written a [Princeton Press book](#) on economic history but I do not believe that long run history is relevant for thinking about how we will adapt to climate change. In this [blog post](#), I discuss [recent work](#) by Geoffrey Parker as he sketches stories from hundreds of years ago and hints that they foreshadow our future.

But, past failures to adapt provide little guidance about our future when today we are; 1. urbanized, 2. richer, 3. We have more education and thus can solve more anticipated challenges, 4. The Internet connects us and provides real time information about emerging threats, 5. new markets keep opening in insurance and food that allow for better risk smoothing. These five trends induce a “non-stationarity” — meaning that past doom and gloom about how past people coped with shocks vastly over-states our collective inability to adapt to vague but anticipated challenges. Of course it will be easier to adapt if we mitigate now. But we haven’t and we won’t. Atmospheric CO₂ will exceed 500ppm with growth in the developing world. What happens next?