A completely unprecedented period of human history that began in the 19th Century may have come to an end between 2005 and 2008.
After the industrial revolution got in full swing in the late 19th C,

public health improved,
food quantity expanded,

life spans extended,

human population soared,
mass production of consumer goods exploded,

wealth and leisure boomed creating

a prosperous middle class,
and the once mainly local and then national political economic system knit into an increasingly global, though anarchic, system.
These, and many related changes were enabled by revolutionary new energy sources:
First coal in the 19th Century, and then petroleum during the 20th century, enabled new modes of production and transportation —most dramatically the automobile and the airplane.
In addition, old print-based technologies and institutions were threatened, augmented, or replaced by electric and electronic technologies and institutions of communication and control.
Science provided the understanding, and **technology** the means, that were necessary to transform eons-old agricultural societies into urban industrial societies, then more recently into globalizing information societies.
and, some futurists think, now into cosmic dream societies.
During this extraordinary span of a mere 200+ years, a single view of the future emerged and prevailed.

It is variously called “progress”, “development” and “continued economic growth”.
Education, law, governance—all institutions—came to have one purpose:
to require and to enable everyone to contribute to the creation and expansion of a continuously growing and prosperous industrial nation.
The YMCA is a perfect example of a social institution created specifically by and for the transition from agricultural societies to industrial societies.
While founded in London in the mid 19th C., the Y soon spread to many growing urban centers worldwide.
The function of the Y initially was to tame the huge number of white, young, single, Protestant men who were lured or forced to move.
from the protection and surveillance of small farming communities to the temptations, dangers, and anonymity of big, evil cities.
The earliest Ys provided places where young men could live safely together in Spartan comfort, with moral guidance, and wholesome physical activities,
So that they could learn how to contribute to the strength and power of the growing industrial nation-state.
Though the focus remained on single young men, Ys soon also developed to serve women, African-Americans, immigrants from many cultures, and in cities all over the world.
Indeed, one of the most noteworthy things about the early YMCA was its international character.
The world has changed enormously since the Y was created.
Farm communities have vanished all over the so-called developed world.

Few men are even industrial workers.
Many are knowledge workers

while others are becoming dream weavers.
As the world continues to grow in numbers and wealth, the Y intends to keep pace with those changes.
Every aspect of society,

including you and your organization,

was founded on the desirability and possibility of a growing future.
You have been taught to assume the existence of a perpetually economically-growing world, with ever more prosperous people,
I am here with you today to consider whether that world is going to continue more or less unchanged, or not.

If so, in what ways might it unfold?
And if not,
what other futures might be awaiting you
that you need to begin preparing for
so that you can succeed and prosper
*whatever the actual future turns out to be.*
That is my aim:

that at the end of the day, you will have begun to develop—or to strengthen—policies and practices that are robust against all possible futures.
But first, a few words about what “futures studies” is and is not.
Futurists can not

*predict*

THE Future

(No one can)
A prediction

is intended to be
a true statement

an accurate statement

about the futures.

Once we lived in communities
where prediction was possible.

Not now!
But futurists can and do forecast **Alternative Futures**

(and so should you)
A forecast is intended to be a logical statement a useful statement about the futures.
Futures are plural, alternative, diverse, possible: futuribles

Not THE Future but Alternative Futures
Most importantly, futures studies helps institutions and individuals envision, design, and move towards preferred futures, rather than passively accepting whatever “will be”.
WHAT’S NEXT??
The answer to the question:

*what's next?*

is *always*:

*There are four generic alternative futures.*
Four Generic Images of the Futures

Grow

Collapse

Discipline

Transform
WHAT’ S NEXT??
WHAT’S NEXT?

GROW
WHAT’S NEXT?

COLLAPSE
WHAT’S NEXT?

DISCIPLINE
WHAT’S NEXT?

TRANSFORM
Please note that these four futures are not simply variations on a common theme such as "high, medium, and low", or "optimistic or pessimistic".

Each future makes very different assumptions about a number of common driving forces discussed earlier.
Very importantly, we did NOT make them up.

The four futures are each based on an extensive literature written by responsible people who are earnestly trying to understand what lies ahead, and coming to very, very different conclusions.
Grow
(The official view of the future everywhere)
The overwhelming majority of all images of the futures today are variations of Grow, especially Continued Economic Growth.
Continued economic growth is the "official" future of all advanced nations and hence of all components of nations, including universities.
Since the 19th Century the fundamental purpose of all modern social systems has been to enable the nation-state it serves to grow and prosper economically and militarily compared to other nation-states.
It is very difficult for the administrators of modern social systems to imagine any other purpose for their institutions.
And yet *nothing is forever*.

Everything that now exists at one time did not exist and at one time will not exist.

Societies, and their components, constantly *emerge, rise, mature, decline and die.*
Currently, collapse images of the futures are gaining some popularity as more people than usual worry about the unsustainable environment and economy.
For the past decade or so, I have also been calling the attention of decision makers to what I call ‘The Unholy Trinity, Plus One’.
This is a future without cheap and abundant energy;
A future with unstable climate, sea-level rise, insufficient food and water, severe environmental pollution;
A future with challenging **global** population growth and **local** population decline;
A future
without a sustainable economy
that distributes wealth fairly;
and a future
with governments
that have lost
the ability to govern.
In part to avoid collapse, and in part in recognition of the impossibility and undesirability of continued economic growth, many more people now share some kind of a disciplined image of the future, often currently expressed as “sustainability.”
It is necessary to *adopt certain values* (other than "growth") and to *discipline our life* and actions around them if we are to survive and thrive, many people believe.
Finally, many futurists agree that continued economic growth is unsustainable, but insist that many technologies are *converging* rapidly in such a way as to **transform** society as profoundly and unpredictably as a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly, or as liquid water is transformed into steam (or ice).
A Dream Society.
A Creative Society
of leisure, abundance, play, and
full unemployment!
So whenever you think about and plan for the futures,

always think about and plan for all four equally seriously and fully.

Don’t privilege one over the others.
As I said at the outset, the first Ys taught young males how to be “men” in the absence of traditional role models and support groups.
That is, how to be “city men” and not “farm men” any more.
What it means to be “a man” has been very, very different at different times and places.
In early colonial America, most men worked as slaves, servants, or solitary farmers.

The ideal “man” was someone who did not work at all.
But as America changed into an urban society where work shifted from manual to mental labor, the ideal of manliness changed too,
and so many of the Ys focused on developing men who were good at sports and other physical activities—something unimaginable in agricultural societies.
There was no time and no need for “sports” on the farm.

There was always hard work that needed to be done.
But life in the cities was different. There was more leisure time, and the Y wanted young men to spend it in good, wholesome ways.
And now, as societies have shifted from industrial to information societies, the ideal man vacillates between being a professionally-augmented superman on the one hand,
and gentle, caring, nurturing mate on the other.
What is the ideal “man” in a society with clones, cyborgs, robots and artificial intelligence?
But wait.
What if society is collapsing?
What if the “Unholy Trinity” is coming true?
Then we will need men (and women and children) who are hard physical workers again.
In a discipline society, we will need:
- men who can lead confidentially;
- men who can curb their desires;
- men who can follow the rules obediently.
So the Y of the future depends on the functions of the future, and what it takes to be a “man” in such a future.
Don’t assume that what it means to be a man now will continue to be so much longer.
Some of the manly ways of the past may become very relevant again.
Or maybe we will require entirely new “men”—

perhaps “manly” in ways offensive to us now.
Maybe “manliness” has no relevance in the future.
Does “manliness” have any relevance now?
You know better than I that

the Y has never been only about young Christian men.
The YMCA of the early 21st Century doesn’t talk much about men or young men at all any more.

And not much about Christianity either.
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:
Nurturing the potential of every child and teen.

HEALTHY LIVING:
Improving the nation's health and well-being.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:
Giving back and providing support to our neighbors.
It is hard to imagine more important concerns than these,
though I would suggest you might also want to add Aging and Healthy Aging to your main list since dealing with increasing elderly and declining youth will be a huge challenge in all communities.
Which future?

and for whom?

should the Y now prepare?
I say,
prepare for all futures.
Don’t “guess” which future is “correct”.

Prepare now for whatever future emerges.
To borrow a phrase from another organization that emerged about the same time the Y did, and for similar reasons:
Be Prepared!
Four Futures
For Six Ys

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