

## For immediate release

### The Architectural League of New York commissions ten reports, names editorial teams for its new American Roundtable initiative

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April 29, New York, NY—The Architectural League of New York announced today that it has commissioned ten editorial teams to prepare reports on small to mid-size communities from across the United States. The reports have been commissioned as part of American Roundtable, a new Architectural League initiative that will bring together on-the-ground perspectives on the condition of American communities and what they need to thrive going forward.

Communities across America are being transformed by changing economic drivers; new patterns of mobility; legacies of environmental, racial, class, and spatial injustice; volatile and vitriolic politics coupled with chronic short-termism and near-sightedness; the impacts of climate change; and other forces. Yet our understanding of these small and mid-size communities is often reduced to caricature and oversimplification. The hope for American Roundtable is to highlight, in all their complexity and nuance, communities too often overlooked and to provide platforms for individuals and organizations to share their stories and work imagining, understanding, and improving their local built environments.

Nearly 125 submissions, representing 40 states and territories, were received in response to the League's American Roundtable Call for Proposals. A Selection Committee of practitioners and academics from across the United States reviewed the proposals. The selected proposals represent a significant range of locales of diverse size, geography, economic condition, and culture.

Commissioned editors will lead teams of contributors to produce the following reports:

**Africatown, Alabama (a neighborhood of Mobile)**, Renee Kemp-Rotan, Editor. **Appalachia, West Virginia (communities across northern West Virginia)**, Nina Chase, Editor, Merritt Chase. **Brownsville, Texas**, Lizzie MacWillie, Kelsey Menzel, Jesse Miller, and Josué Ramirez, Editors. **Cheyenne River Reservation, South Dakota**, Annie Coombs and Zoë Malliaros, Editors. **Clarksdale, Mississippi**, Esther Choi and Jonathan Tate, Editors. **Lower Rio Grande Valley, New Mexico**, Ane González Lara, Editor. **River Valley, Maine (Rumford and surrounding communities)**, Aaron Cayer and Kerri Arsenault, Editors. **South Beach, Washington (communities along the Washington state Pacific coast)**, Robert Hutchison and Dan Abramson, Editors. **Southeast Good Food Corridor, North Carolina (Robeson and Scotland counties)**, Morgan Augillard, Noran Sanford, Joey Swerdlin, Editors. **Youngstown-Warren-Lordstown, Ohio**, Quilian Riano and Terry Schwarz, Content Editors, Kristen Zeiber and Katie Slusher, Mapping/Graphics Editors, Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, Kent State University.

*"The quantity, quality, and range of the submissions to American Roundtable, and the inventive nature of the selected proposals underscore the challenges that characterize the diverse communities in our complex country. Now, it is even more of an imperative to give voice to local places to envision a better, collective future."*

—Paul Lewis, Architectural League President and Selection Committee member

*"The proposals reflected the tremendous richness and diversity of America's small cities, towns, and rural regions, so often collapsed into stereotype or dismissed altogether in our national narratives. For every proposal we received there were dozens of stories contained in it: of natural spaces, economic histories, unique cultures, and incredible people that I wanted to hear more about."*

—Sue Mobley, Selection Committee member

*"These enlightening proposals gave voice to a group of diverse and transformative communities around the country. From cultural celebrations and struggles to climate change and solutions to overcoming blight and remaking communities, we found so many stories that are important to be told. They can serve as examples for all of us. Our country is not monolithic or simple. It is a rich and diverse palette of people and communities. I am excited to see the expanded studies of the winning teams."*

—Anne Marie Duvall Decker, Selection Committee member

*"It was extraordinarily heartening to see the amount and quality of architectural research and work taking place in small communities across the country, and it was incredibly inspiring to learn about the efforts of individuals and local organizations working steadily, without fanfare and in the face of significant challenges, to improve their communities."*

—Rosalie Genevro, Architectural League Executive Director and Selection Committee member

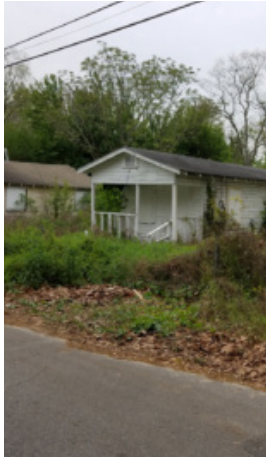
*"The submissions...presented vivid snapshots of the issues facing small and medium sized towns and cities. The issues detailed the relationships between economics, labor, and urban space as well as the entanglements of cultural histories, memory, and environmental concerns."*

—Mario Gooden, Selection Committee member

The Selection Committee included Nicholas Anderson (Philadelphia, PA), David Dowell (Kansas City, MO), Anne Marie Duvall Decker (Jackson, MS), Rosalie Genevro (New York, NY), Mario Gooden (New York, NY), Paul Lewis (New York, NY), Jonathan Massey (Ann Arbor, MI), Sue Mobley (New Orleans, LA), Erin Moore (Eugene, OR), Lyn Rice (New York, NY), and Jason Schupbach (Tempe, AZ).

American Roundtable is organized by League Executive Director Rosalie Genevro and Project Director Nicholas Anderson in collaboration with the American Roundtable Steering Committee of Architectural League board members Mario Gooden, Paul Lewis, and Lyn Rice.

For more information, go to [www.archleague.org/project/american-roundtable](http://www.archleague.org/project/american-roundtable)



Left: Bust of Cudjo Kazpola Lewis, Africatown Founder, 1865. Right: Present State of Africatown with vacant lots and tax-delinquent properties. Photographs by Vickii Howell, M.O.V.E. CDC, courtesy of Renee Kemp-Rotan.

**Africatown, Alabama (a neighborhood of Mobile),**  
Renee Kemp-Rotan, Editor

“Africatown is a unique nineteenth-century settlement built by Africans in America at the end of the Civil War. Today, it mimics other underserved rural areas—highways that separate, redlines that discriminate. Yet, Africatown has a rich history—an embarrassment of riches. Soon, this American Roundtable case study along with The Africatown International Design Ideas Competition will assemble a compelling catalogue of community-based advocacy tools—to better leverage the recent discovery of the last slave ship Clotilda into an economic blueprint for Africatown’s resurrection as a twenty-first-century cultural heritage destination, where many Clotilda descendants still reside.” M.O.V.E. Gulf Coast Community Development Corporation is serving as this project’s fiscal sponsor.



Photograph by Rebecca Kiger, courtesy of Merritt Chase.

**Appalachia, West Virginia (communities across northern West Virginia),**  
Nina Chase, Editor, Merritt Chase

“Appalachia Rising will document West Virginia communities where emerging land-based projects are providing inspiring, sustainable alternatives for the state’s declining extraction economy. The report will additionally propose a post-carbon agenda, giving creative space to imagine and document novel relationships with the region’s landscapes.”



Photograph by Omar Hakeem, bcWorkshop.

**Brownsville, Texas,** Lizzie MacWillie, Kelsey Menzel, Jesse Miller, and Josué Ramirez, Editors

“Brownsville’s news coverage for the last decade began with being designated the poorest metropolitan area in the U.S. and wrapped up with the arrival of the space industry and natural gas pipelines – following a trend where major infrastructure and development investments face up against the realities of persistent poverty and high rates of obesity and diabetes. With their own voices, residents and community leaders of Texas’s southernmost border city will share their stories about the causes and outcomes of these inequalities, while envisioning opportunities for a more equitable future.”



Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Labor Day Pow Wow, Eagle Butte, South Dakota. Photograph courtesy of Annie Coombs and Zoë Malliaros.

**Cheyenne River Reservation, South Dakota,** Annie Coombs and Zoë Malliaros, Editors

“Our project will explore the intersection of infrastructural, environmental, educational, economic, and cultural forces that affect the lives and health of the Lakota people on the Cheyenne River Reservation. Through a combination of case studies, interviews, maps, and photography we will offer a platform for native voices, shed light on issues that are found to be the most challenging and dire, and highlight the success stories of those who are working hard to help the community.”





**Clarksdale, Mississippi**, Esther Choi and Jonathan Tate, Editors

“Touted as the birthplace of the Delta Blues, Clarksdale, Mississippi has long based its struggling economy on a model of cultural value extraction, with little state or municipal reinvestment into the city’s human (and therefore, cultural) capital. This study, produced with different community stakeholders in Clarksdale—individuals, non-profit organizations, businesses, and elected officials—will investigate and challenge longstanding beliefs about the way that we typically think about labor and cultural value in relation to social, ecological, and economic change.”

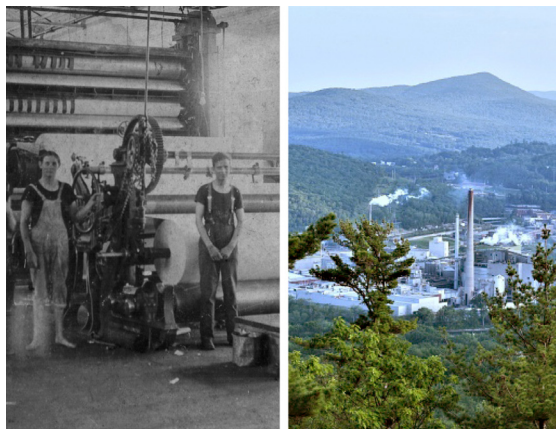
Photograph copyright Office of Jonathan Tate.



**Lower Rio Grande Valley, New Mexico**, Ane González Lara, Editor

“In this report, seven features coming from diverse voices will capture the challenges and potential of the lower Rio Grande Valley. These features will include personal narratives, stories, and constituents that historically haven’t been included in the main narrative of this area. The report will cover some of the leading issues that the region faces today, such as legacies of environmental racism, water scarcity, border security, indigenous rights, agricultural distress, and many more.”

Qualitas Health Farm, Columbus, New Mexico. Photograph by Qualitas Health, courtesy of Ane González Lara.



**River Valley, Maine (Rumford and surrounding communities)**, Aaron Cayer and Kerri Arsenault, Editors

“Maine’s forest-dependent paper mill community, the River Valley, serves as a microcosm for working-class towns across America: beyond its abundant lakes, rivers, forests, and mountains, the community has, for decades, struggled to escape the vicious and entrapping cycles of resource extraction and abuse, labor exploitation, pollution, and corporate profiteering. This report will consider the challenges associated with machine age work in an age of post-industrialization by amplifying the concerns of the River Valley’s increasingly voiceless community and by celebrating its natural resources.”

Left: Workers at the Oxford Paper Mill, Rumford, Maine, ca. 1901-2. Right: View of the River Valley from the ledge of Mexico, Maine, 2018. Photographs courtesy of Aaron Cayer and Kerri Arsenault.



**South Beach, Washington (communities along the Washington state Pacific coast)**, Robert Hutchison and Dan Abramson, Editors

“The interconnected towns of the South Beach community share a deep connection to place and ecology, as well as an immediate and direct risk of exposure to sea level rise and a major tsunami event. Our project will use these two seemingly contradictory themes as protagonists to construct a narrative that frames the challenges as well as opportunities that the community faces in their not-so-distant future.”

Westport, Washington. Photograph by Robert Hutchison.



GrowingChange Youth Leader, Jaja, gives a tour of a former prison campus. Photograph by Group Project.

**Southeast Good Food Corridor, North Carolina (Robeson and Scotland counties),** Morgan Augillard, Noran Sanford, and Joey Swerdlin, Editors

“The Southeast Good Food Corridor is both a physical stretch along Interstate 74 that connects Greensboro to Wilmington in rural, southern North Carolina and an interdependent group of organizations and individuals that live and work along it. The report will highlight this vibrant, resilient, and innovative community which is fighting many of the built environment challenges affecting rural towns across America. Their efforts take on food instability, youth entering the penal system, rising unemployment, deindustrialization, declining health outcomes, decreased number of farms and independent farmers, and increased numbers of neglected brownfield properties.”



Unoccupied steel mill along the Mahoning River Valley. Photograph courtesy of the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative.

**Youngstown-Warren-Lordstown, Ohio,** Quilian Riano and Terry Schwarz, Content Editors, Kristen Zeiber and Katie Slusher, Mapping/Graphics Editors, Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, Kent State University.

“The physical and social landscapes of Ohio’s Youngstown-Warren-Lordstown Metropolitan Area are characterized both by the manufacturing and industrial prowess the area experienced during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as well as the steady population and job loss it has faced since the 1970s. We will address the American Roundtable topic areas through the lens of the region’s changing industry, economy, and labor markets – documenting what has been lost as well as identifying new economic and social models that have arisen to provide opportunities for local inhabitants, and how these opportunities are changing the spatial and social infrastructures of the community.”

## Support

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Graham  
Foundation

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## About The Architectural League

The Architectural League of New York nurtures excellence in architecture, design, and urbanism, and stimulates thinking and action on the critical design and building issues of our time. As a vital, independent forum for architecture and its allied disciplines, the League helps create a more beautiful, vibrant, innovative, and sustainable future. For more information, visit [archleague.org](http://archleague.org).