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## The Architectural League's **American Roundtable** publishes new reports and discussion recordings on nine small and mid-size communities across the United States

The Architectural League is pleased to announce the publication of nine reports commissioned by its **American Roundtable** initiative. The project brings together on-the-ground perspectives on the condition of American communities and what they need to thrive going forward.

The reports are both evocative explorations of specific places and interrogations of the many forces—positive and negative—that shape the built environment. They celebrate the care shown by individuals and groups who work to make their communities better, and challenge the design professions to reimagine how architects, planners, and others engage their work. Drawing on their deep local ties and relationships, each team of editors and contributors created reports that include multiple features taking many different forms—including essays, photography, graphics, mapping, interviews, video, and other media—all organized around five key topic areas: Public Space, Health, Work and Economy, Infrastructure, and Environment.

### The Reports

Nearly 125 submissions, representing 40 states and territories, were received in response to the League's American Roundtable Call for Proposals. The nine proposals developed into full reports were chosen by a selection committee of practitioners and academics from across the United States.

**Africatown, Alabama** (a neighborhood of Mobile) by **Renee Kemp-Rotan** and **Vickii Howell**

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

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

**The Lower Rio Grande region of New Mexico** by **Ane González Lara**

**Along the Lumbee River, North Carolina** (communities in Richmond, Robeson, and Scotland counties) by **Morgan Augillard**, **Noran Sanford**, and **Joey Swerdlin**

**Mahoning Valley, Ohio** (Youngstown, Warren, and other communities) by **Quilian Riano** and **Kristen Zeiber**

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

**South Beach, Washington** (communities between Westport and Tokeland along the Washington state Pacific coast) by **Robert Hutchison** and **Daniel Abramson**

**West Virginia** (Appalachian small towns and cities across the state) by **Nina Chase**

The full reports can be found at [archleague.org/americanroundtable](http://archleague.org/americanroundtable). The reports were complemented by a series of online public programs featuring informal presentations and discussions with report editors, contributors, and community representatives. Recordings of these programs along with additional editorial material can be found on the project's website.



## More about American Roundtable

American Roundtable responds to complex questions faced by communities large and small across the country:

- How does the control or ownership of land determine a community's future?
- How might smaller communities with limited capital assert their agency?
- How does the pull of place and home match a culture and economy that often celebrates and demands mobility?
- How do legacies of environmental, racial, class, and spatial injustice continue to affect the wellbeing and opportunity of communities?
- How are these "out of the way" places affected by national and global decisions?
- How does a community effect change and organize to ensure its needs are met and its voice is heard?

While there are no definitive answers to such questions, the reports collectively seek to advance and enrich our understanding by offering local, lived perspectives informed by the conditions of the diverse locations and communities.

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



Credit: Graveyardwalker (Amy Walker), CC BY-SA 4.0

## ***If We Can Save the Ship, We Can Save the Town***

**Africatown, AL (a neighborhood of Mobile)**

Lead Editor: **Renee Kemp-Rotan**, Associate Editor: **Vickii Howell**

Contributors: **Vickii Howell, Renee Kemp-Rotan, Nathaniel Patterson, Deborah Plant, Ramsey Sprague, and Craig Wilkins**

Africatown is a small community of Mobile, Alabama, founded by emancipated Africans who had been illegally trafficked to the United States by slave-traders in 1860 aboard the ship *Clotilda*. *If We Can Save the Ship, We Can Save the Town* tells the story of this community's ongoing fight, now catalyzed by the recent archaeological discovery of the *Clotilda*, to reclaim its history and revitalize its future. The report asks: Can a community use history, culture, and tourism to create equitable, sustainable development for the benefit of residents? How has the built environment contributed to Africatown's struggles with poverty, isolation, encroaching industry, and lack of services? What opportunities exist through design and planning to give new agency to this unique and resilient community? M.O.V.E. Gulf Coast Community Development Corporation served as this report's fiscal sponsor.



Credit: Jesse Miller

## ***Brownsville Undercurrents***

**Brownsville, TX**

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

Contributors: **Jordana Barton, Bere Cruz Marquez, Amanda Davé, Zoraima Diaz-Pineda, Chloe Dotson, Ruben Garza, Veronica Gaona, Bekah Hinojosa, Edna Ledesma, Lizzie MacWillie, Kelsey Menzel, Jesse Miller, Nick Mitchell-Bennett, Edna Ocegüera, Christina Maria Xochitlzihuatl Patiño Houle, Josué Ramirez, Martha Sanchez, and Dolly Sevier**

Brownsville is the southernmost city along the US-Mexico border and has been long defined by economic speculation, inequity, and racism. How can grassroots organizations and individuals advocate for equitable development and the planning, housing, infrastructural, and transportation needs of underserved communities? How might design engage social service agencies to better serve populations? What strategies are being used to improve the lives of residents in informal settlements, such as the colonias of this border region? In a city of Tejano, Anglo, Indigenous, and Mexican communities, how can public space and civic monuments be reimaged to create a more inclusive future for Brownsville, Texas?



Credit: Dawnee LeBeau

## ***The Lakota Nation and the Legacy of American Colonization***

**Cheyenne River Reservation, SD**

Editors: **Annie Coombs and Zoë Malliaros**

Contributors: **Annie Coombs, Andrew Corley, Dana Dupris, Tammy Eagle Bull, Ben Elk Eagle, Misha Friedman, Marcella Gilbert, Samantha Herrald, Dawnee LeBeau, Lacy Maher, Zoë Malliaros, Carol Mann, Tatewin Means, Kimberly Pelkofsky, Jessie Story, Lakota Vogel, Sharon Vogel, and Bob Walters**

The Cheyenne River Reservation is the sovereign territory of the Cheyenne River Lakota Nation and a legacy of American colonization, a process that included state-sponsored genocide and land theft. How has this shameful history shaped this community and its built environment? How did the Lakota traditionally understand space and community, and how are they looking to reconnect to and reestablish their culture's understanding of the land and settlement? Can contemporary approaches to housing, infrastructure, health, economic opportunity, transportation, and education be shaped to respectfully serve the needs of the Lakota people, and the exigencies of extremely low-density rural communities such as those of the Cheyenne River Reservation and neighboring Pine Ridge? What legal, bureaucratic, and governance structures need to be rethought for Indigenous communities—on or off reservations—to flourish?





Credit: John Acosta

## ***Diverse Peoples, Arid Landscapes, and the Built Environment***

**Lower Rio Grande, NM**

Editor: **Ane González Lara**

Contributors: **John Acosta, Saray Argumedo, Miguel Calatayud, Lucia Carmona, Tina Cordova, Oliver Enjady, Ane González Lara, Theodore Jojola, Lyla June, Kathleen Kambic, and Patricia Riggs**

Arid landscapes and rich overlays of cultures define the Lower Rio Grande Valley of south-central New Mexico. These two conditions and the challenges and opportunities they present will confront ever more American communities in the years to come. As the region charts its future course through the issues of environmental racism, water scarcity, border security, and agricultural distress, and builds on the strengths of its multiculturalism and movement for Indigenous rights, what can be learned from this land and its peoples?



Credit: Andie Rea

## ***Along the Lumbee River***

**North Carolina (Richmond, Robeson, and Scotland counties)**

Editors: **Morgan Augillard, Noran Sanford, and Joey Swerdlin**

Contributors: **Morgan Augillard, Alex Bodkin, Tanner Capps, Isadora Dannin, Davon Goodwin, Group Project, GrowingChange Youth Leaders, Deb Gunsallus, Kimber Heinz, Ed Hunt, Kailin Jones, Christie Poteet, Andie Rea, Jorden Revels, Noran Sanford, and Joey Swerdlin**

*Along the Lumbee River* shares the stories of residents in a racially diverse rural region of swamps and sandhills in south-central North Carolina. How has the history of the region's African-American, white, and Indigenous Lumbee peoples been inscribed on the land? What can communities do to confront histories and physical sites of incarceration, forced labor, and racial and environmental injustice? How do communities define their identities and sense of faith through the landscape? How are innovative agricultural practices creating a future of sustainable livelihoods, collective productivity, and support? How can “small-d” design help communities better understand and articulate their spatial needs?



Photo courtesy Quilian Riano

## ***In the Mahoning Valley***

**Mahoning Valley, OH (Youngstown, Warren, and other communities)**

Editors: **Quilian Riano and Kristen Zeiber**

Contributors: **Building a Better Warren, Charles Frederick, Helen Liggett, Roy Messing, Quilian Riano, Jennifer Roller, Terry Schwarz, and Kristen Zeiber**

Youngstown, Warren, Lordstown, and other communities along Ohio's Mahoning River flourished as sites for steel and automobile production through much of the twentieth century, forming middle-class communities that prospered for decades. Today, this region is often presented as a poster child for post-industrial decline and all its accompanying challenges. What immediate actions might communities take to ameliorate population loss, superfluous infrastructure, unemployment, and the withdrawal of capital? How can formerly industrial cities reimagine new futures? What can be done to reconnect to nature on sites long defined and scarred by heavy industry?



Credit: Aaron Cayer

## ***Labor, Landscapes, and Legacies***

**River Valley, ME (Rumford and surrounding communities)**

Editors: **Aaron Cayer** and **Kerri Arsenault**

Contributors: **Kerri Arsenault, Aaron Cayer, Nina Elder, John Freeman, Elizabeth Kaney, Tom Leytham, and Steve Norton & N.B.Aldrich**

In the early twentieth century, Rumford, Mexico, and the other communities of Maine's River Valley rapidly grew around a massive paper mill. Today, this mill's future is uncertain, and its legacies of extraction, toxicity, and labor strife continue to shape the region's environment, health, and social fabric. How can a town, long defined by a single industry, confront its past? How might it imagine and construct a future centered on a new identity?



Credit: Eirik Johnson

## ***Dynamic Landscapes***

**South Beach, WA (communities along the Washington state Pacific coast)**

Editors: **Robert Hutchison** and **Daniel Abramson**

Contributors: **Gregory Hicks, Eirik Johnson, Cory Mattheis, Skip Swenson, and Barbara Swift**  
South Beach, Washington, is doubly subject to the forces of water and wind, situated on the most rapidly changing part of the Pacific coastline of the United States and at risk for a catastrophic earthquake and tsunami event. It is also an area of exceptionally rich ecology, including productive fisheries and timber lands. How has this community been formed by this unique environment and learned to live in this dynamic landscape? In this era of climate change, what might other communities learn from South Beach as it continues to adapt to nature's power?



Credit: Rebecca Kiger

## ***Appalachia Rising***

**West Virginia (Appalachian small towns and cities across the state)**

Editor: **Nina Chase**

Contributors: **Nina Chase, Rebecca Kiger, Elaine McMillion Sheldon, Merritt Chase, Brittany Patterson, and Caroline Filice Smith**

*Appalachia Rising* documents communities where emerging land-based projects are providing sustainable alternatives for the state's declining extraction economy. What do West Virginia communities look like when they move past extraction-based economies toward alternative land-based futures? How might West Virginians change the narrative about their state, away from a focus on poverty, environmental degradation, and stagnation, to an optimistic vision of equitable prosperity, ecological health, and renewed communities? How can West Virginia rethink its relationship to land, to prioritize the uniqueness and resilience of West Virginia's people and places?

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**Graham  
Foundation**

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## **About The Architectural League**

The Architectural League 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, equitable, innovative, and sustainable future. For more information, visit [archleague.org](http://archleague.org).