Woodrow Wilson had a busy day. On June 7, 1916, the American president met with Louis Brandeis, the future US Supreme Court Justice who had survived a contentious hearing before the Senate a few days earlier. Wilson probably followed the news from Europe as well. Yet, at suppertime, he participated remotely in a ritual usually reserved for local politicians—the dedication of a new road. At 8 p.m., the president pushed a button at the White House, thus closing “a circuit reaching across the Continent.” His fingers activated an electric magnet in Oregon, a weight dropped, and an American flag unfurled. The continent-spanning effort to connect president and flag via wires was part of the dedication ceremony for the Columbia River Highway, which connected Portland with the eastern interior of Oregon by hugging the shores of the Columbia River. With his effortless endorsement, Wilson upgraded a local thoroughfare to a matter of national attention.

Why would a sitting president participate in opening ceremonies for a regional road at a time when more pressing matters—World War I, for instance—were at hand? What, in other words, was so special about this highway? On a personal level, Wilson’s endorsement of this road marked a departure from his earlier criticism of the automobile. While president of Princeton University, he had remarked in 1906 that “nothing has spread socialistic feeling more than the use of automobiles. To the countryman they are a picture of the arrogance of wealth with all its independence and carelessness.” A decade later, Wilson embraced roads as a means of connection, as “a thong between that community and the nation to which it belongs.”
Facing the small, yet rapidly growing group of motorists, Wilson joined the chorus of those who saw promise in automobility and its infrastructures. For Wilson and others, roads such as the Columbia River Highway promised a new type of mobile scenic experience. It is curious to realize that one of the first cultural and environmental repercussions of the rise of automobility was an urge to create a new kind of moving scenery. The automobile was still new during the second decade of the twentieth century. Its place in society, patterns of use, and larger significance were not settled. Some of its promoters claimed that driving, especially on roads such as the Columbia River Highway, restored a connection to nature supposedly lost during the first wave of industrialization. As the alleged antidote to mechanical railroad travel, driving on this riverine road still depended on infrastructures and motorized movement, to be sure. But the display of scenery on this road was not accidental; it was one of its main effects and justifications.

The Oregon road is closely connected to Samuel Lancaster, its main designer and highway booster. He was a civil engineer who wanted to use the road to embellish the scenery. In addition to guiding drivers to the beauty spots along the road to allow for viewing possibilities, Lancaster’s design parameters for the highway set it apart from other winding roads. Driving on it was not to be fraught with danger; it was meant to be uniform and safe. Given the low density of traffic, however, drivers could (and were expected to) stop at their own leisure and explore the total scenery, including the foreground, while parked. The New York Times mentioned natural features and artifacts in one breath: “Its beautiful waterfalls, wonderful rock formations, tunnels, cliffs, retaining walls and artistic bridges all tend to make this delightful thoroughfare America’s most noted example of man’s intelligent development of nature’s creation.” Lancaster was especially proud of the viaduct and tunnel at Mitchell Point, which he declared “fully equal to the famous ‘Axenstrasse’ of Switzerland and one of the great features of the Highway.” Apparently, Lancaster and other local boosters felt that a modern staging of American scenery could make their country competitive, if not on a par, with the scenically and architecturally well-endowed countries of Europe. Such referential attitudes gave way to a more self-centered approach by the 1930s, when parkways achieved national prominence and gained the attention and resources of the federal government.

Lancaster, in his aim to make the scenic features of the river valley “easily
Mitchell Point Tunnel on the Columbia River Highway. Having toured Europe and its roads, road builder Samuel Lancaster emulated the Axenstraße in Switzerland for some of the features of the Columbia River Highway in Oregon. The Mitchell Point Tunnel (above) aims to outdo its Swiss counterpart (opposite) by featuring five windows instead of three. Samuel Christopher Lancaster, The Columbia: America’s Great Highway through the Cascade Mountains to the Sea, 3rd ed. (Portland, Oregon: J. K. Gill, 1926), 124

accessible to all,” claimed hyperbolically that the sights had been “partially hidden, and as far as the general public was concerned they might almost as well have been on the dark continent.” The reference to Africa was telling: roads such as the Columbia River Highway were quasi-colonial in attitude, audience, and aim. Their promoters often used the language of discovery and access when presenting the sights. Such roads were instrumental in organizing space. Building on previous mapping and naming, parts of the topography were then presented as picturesque to visitors. The audience, or colonizers, were affluent city dwellers from Portland or elsewhere. The aim, therefore, was not simply to present scenery, but to order and commodify it. A local promoter and advocate of the road put it bluntly: “We will cash in, year after year, on our crop of scenic beauty, without depleting it in any way.” The view from such scenic roads was the result of design, planning, cultural politics, and local schemes. Gazing at such roads allows us to under-
stand why desires and fears came together in a particular historical moment and took the form of these particular roadways.

While the Columbia River Highway rarely receives praise in national newspapers today and Woodrow Wilson’s legacy is defined by events other than his remote role in the road’s inauguration, such roads still matter. They helped to bring forth the specific kind of ambulatory, scenic tourism that Ilf and Petrov were so astonished to find in the United States. While it was more extensive in this country than elsewhere, it drew on and was part of an international exchange of knowledge, expertise, and views regarding scenic infrastructures. Since they offered functional use and scenic recreation, and often did so simultaneously, these connections expressed roadmindedness in both North America and Europe.

Rather than a firmly defined set of beliefs and practices, roadmindedness was an uneven but successful process of prioritizing roads in society, culture, and politics. Its advocates changed over time and included varying professional and social groups and individuals with sometimes different agendas. They used various jargons and means of influence, but they all became roadminded and convinced others to do the same. For example, journalists
and politicians who decried the dominant role of railroads in transportation saw roads, trucking, and automobiles as forces to counter corporate behemoths (in the United States) or a state-owned monopolist (in Germany). Civil engineers and landscape architects correctly sensed new professional opportunities. Aesthetically minded writers welcomed roads as places to regain sensuous connections to the landscapes surrounding transportation corridors. The roster of roadminded individuals included Thomas Mac-Donald, Robert Moses, Emily Post, and Lewis Mumford in the United States, the Anglo-French writer Hilaire Belloc, as well as Fritz Todt, Alwin Seifert, and Hans-Christoph Seebohm in Germany. As this book will show, some of these individuals remained steadfast champions of the cause while others (such as Lewis Mumford) were initially enthusiastic but became some of its most ardent critics. Some conservationists, especially in the early twentieth century, were roadminded, while many of their later versions abhorred the very idea. National governments lent administrative support and unprecedented monies to the process, thus ensuring its infrastructural longevity.

Despite these differences, one compatible goal united these roadminded voices: the idea that roadbuilding was economically, socially, and culturally beneficial. Roadmindedness included a set of attitudes, policies, and funding practices that promoted the planning, design, construction, and (to a lesser degree) maintenance of streets and roads. Roadmindedness was built on the simple yet powerful belief that roads had intrinsic value; perhaps the most important attribute of roadmindedness was to make their utility and cultural worth self-evident. It elevated roads. They used to be ancient, quotidian, and multipurpose spaces on which people, animals, and various vehicles moved. Instead, they became a modern, paved, reliable, all-weather, and all-season infrastructure for automobiles and trucks—or only cars, in the case of American parkways. The result of campaigns, books, newspaper articles, and lobbying was the firmly anchored and no longer questioned understanding of roads as emblems of economic growth, technological modernity, and even beauty. To be modern was to be roadminded. While contemporaneous observers did not use the term themselves, roadmindedness is useful for understanding this process.

During the middle third of the twentieth century, roadmindedness claimed a higher national priority in the United States and Germany in a particular form: scenic infrastructures, such as parkways and other scenic highways, received cultural validation, as well as administrative and finan-
cial resources from regional, state, and central governments. Such scenic infrastructures promised to leave behind the ostensibly chaotic and polluted landscape of transportation created by railroads, their corporations, and their users. An orderly, clean, and attractive new landscape was to appear.

While other scholars have examined the changing meanings of automobility and driving in various contexts, my goal is to compare the history of parkways and other scenic roads in Germany and the United States as interconnected icons of roadmindedness. Rather than taking designers and promoters at their word and perpetuating the idea that such roads emerged from and reflected particular national settings and values, this book examines roads in these two countries side by side. Seen from this perspective, international entanglements and the circulation of knowledge on landscapes and roads figure much more prominently. Comparing does not mean equating, however. These comparisons bring into sharp relief the differences between a democracy and a dictatorship, and the tensions between mass-based consumerism and the appeal of national, iconic technologies. While Germany and the United States shared the same time frame for the high point of this set of attitudes and actions, their origins and specific histories differed.

Comparing these two roadminded countries, and the ways in which they arrived at roadmindedness and its manifestations, also allows for a fresh perspective on the history of speed and driving. Not all movement is inevitably geared toward going ever faster. At first glance, the history of transportation would appear to evolve from organic forms such as walking and horse-drawn coaches to increasingly rapid mechanized means of moving via trains, automobiles, and airplanes. But even in today’s globalized economy, most freight moves at the relatively leisurely pace of large ships. Their size has increased much more dramatically than their speed. Supersonic air travel is all but dead. Automobiles in cities are often stuck in traffic rather than moving speedily. The pace of automotive travel is regulated and supervised, even though the response to speed limits makes many drivers scofflaws. The history of parkways and scenic roads in Germany and the United States helps us understand how acceleration and deceleration of traffic were not the results of intrinsic advantages of particular technologies and modes of transportation. Traffic does not go progressively faster, nor does it slow down as a matter of course. Rather, different groups in society acting at different times with different values and goals declared certain speeds to be appropriate or
useful. Many parkways and other scenic roads were designed with deceleration in mind. Purposefully winding roads forced drivers to go slow and appreciate landscapes, rather than hurry through them. Driving slower, however, was contested and not generally accepted. Speedy and slow movement are intertwined in much more interesting ways than the idea of constant acceleration would suggest.\(^\text{14}\)

As an international movement, roadmindedness had no single point of origin, either geographically or chronologically. But several individuals, organized movements, state agencies, and other institutions pushed such views and practices much higher on political, social, and cultural agendas. In doing so, roadminded champions upheld this process on four distinct yet related levels: as an engineering and political movement, as an international movement, as a cultural and environmental idea, and as a touristic device. These levels of roadmindedness were intertwined in planning and building individual roads, but it is helpful to disentangle some of these strands in the following pages.

For roadmindedness, movements and institutions mattered. The Good Roads Movement in the United States and the Bureau of Public Roads in its early years, while primarily interested in utilitarian roads for farmers and commerce, helped to introduce the idea of constructing road networks for economic growth. This was not as self-evident as it might appear today. Given the slow start of motorization in Germany, no institutional equivalents existed there before 1920. In other words, roadmindedness had more vocal advocates at this time in the United States than in Germany. Even the Americans, however, referenced European roads and scenic infrastructures, especially in Alpine locations, as the Mitchell Point example shows vividly. Given the prominence of Switzerland and other Alpine countries for scenic infrastructures, their promotion of tourism via road was of major international consequence. Roadmindedness took on institutional force in the National Park Service (NPS) with its ambitious agenda of building scenic roads. International road conferences, an important forum for exchanging ideas, helped to create a body of cosmopolitan knowledge and a cadre of experts to push for its implementation in individual countries. Crisscrossing the Atlantic is necessary for understanding the different formations of roadmindedness and the ways in which they related to each other. In some cases, the connections were more than obvious; in others, they were purposely hidden.
Roadmindedness in Engineering and Politics

The growth of the road system in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while impressive on its own, owed a lot to related transport technologies. Even though roads and road transport have been omnipresent in human history, the nineteenth-century rise of railroads resulted in a demand for roads. This might seem paradoxical at first glance. However, the growing amounts of freight and numbers of passengers being moved across larger distances by the railroads meant that they had to be fed into and distributed from depots and train stations. While urban public transit and rail feeder lines picked up some of this traffic, coaches, cabs, trucks, and horse-drawn carts moved it on urban, suburban, and rural roads and streets. The spectacular growth of industrial cities and trading hubs depended upon the concomitant rise of railroads and roads.

Roadmindedness exposed and contributed to tensions between urban centers and their hinterlands. Given that more and more vehicles with more and more freight and passengers traversed existing roads, questions of maintenance became contested, especially outside of cities. Often, locals were responsible for the upkeep, but out-of-town users were not. In the case of bicycles, and later automobiles, the displeasure, ire, and occasional physical violence meted out to early adopters had some of their roots in these issues. Organized middle-class urban bicyclists were the first ones to call for a massive new roadbuilding program in the United States. This demand did not sit well with rural residents who abhorred the costs. The Good Roads Movement, as it was called from the 1880s onward, began with the pleas of cyclists on leisure outings, who envisioned smooth, hard roads instead of the dirt roads with seasonal problems that they encountered. By the 1890s, economic arguments based on throughput and ease of traffic began to dominate the conversation about good roads. The federal government initiated surveys and tallied costs and driving times for rural traffic. It built up engineering expertise, both for maintenance and for new construction. Instead of local and varied ways of building and maintaining roads, new federal and state experts sought to define good and acceptable roads.

In the process, variety gave way to conformity. As historian Christopher Wells has noted, there was an unmistakably environmental aspect to this process: heat, cold, rain, snow, sleet, sunshine, wind, and time of day mattered less and less, as roads were to be passable at all but the most extreme
times, predictable in their surface appearance, and practically useful. Road-mindedness, in this engineering view, included a vision of all-weather, all-year access. In infrastructural terms, one of the reasons for the success of railroads was that their operation did not depend on good weather and the seasons to the same degree as did operating waterways. Now, such regularity came to be the goal of road traffic as well. These visions alone did not convince local politicians—but money did.

Individual states in Germany expanded their arterial highway programs in the second half of the nineteenth century, often based on academic knowledge generated in France’s engineering academies. In the United States, the federal government induced states to upgrade existing roads by offering subsidies in exchange for uniformity of design by the twentieth century. Engineers became policymakers in the process, as the historian Bruce Seely argues. The foremost federal road planner, Thomas H. MacDonald (1881–1957), chief of the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), succinctly noted that the organization of roads and road financing was more difficult than solving technical issues such as paving and road width. Two federal programs, one in 1916 and one in 1921, enshrined a cooperative relationship between Washington and the states: the latter submitted proposals to the administration, which were evaluated according to necessity, as indicated by already existing traffic and conformity to design parameters. By the 1920s, the initial focus on rural roads to improve agriculture had given way to broader attention to urban and suburban transportation. In 1922 alone, some 10,000 miles of new roads were constructed in the United States. Even more astonishing are the 420,000 miles of state roads built between 1921 and 1936, a period that Seely calls the “golden age of highway building.” While popular, these public policies were also the result of pressure groups at work: “Auto manufacturers, auto clubs, the trucking industry, and highway engineers came together to form in effect a single lobby for highway construction and maintenance, bearing on government at all levels,” as two scholars aptly put it.

Federal engineers were not simply responding to requests from the states. They actively encouraged and were part of a campaign of roadmindedness, giving public speeches, writing in the general press, and partaking in lobbying work. While they strove to retain a focus on serving existing local or regional traffic, several other groups proclaimed extensive ideas for long-distance roads, especially after World War I.

Local, regional, and national boosters promoted roadmindedness on
their terms in the interwar period. Chambers of commerce, tourism promoters, and automotive and construction interests introduced proposals for continent-spanning roads such as the Lincoln Highway, connecting New York and San Francisco.26 Rather than publicly financed new construction, these ventures were built on privately organized interests and lobbies and lavish public relations. To some degree, they were merely existing highways decorated with new road markers. Others were but partially realized. The Lincoln Highway, for one, remained under construction for years, especially in the deserts of the American West. No matter: “Keeping the name before the public and a never-ending pressure toward the great objective” was the publicity goal of the highway’s association.27 The growing number of car owners were to be convinced that a highway connecting the two coasts would be worth their time and, eventually, tax dollars.

Automotive traffic, of course, was intensely local, but roadmindedness was to be a national issue. The road- and car-friendly President Wilson received “Highway Certificate #1” in exchange for a five-dollar donation to the Lincoln Highway Association. Other initiatives with similar qualities of imagination included a Dixie Highway, Yellowstone Trail, and Atlantic Highway.28 Some 250 names sprang from the pens of imaginative promoters—too many, in the eyes of federal administrators, who saw confusion and began to implement a regimen of numbering rather than naming highways, which exists to this day.29 Numerical or nominal, roadmindedness had been firmly planted.

The infrastructural enthusiasm in the United States far exceeded any similar sentiments in Germany before 1933. The central government in Berlin left roadbuilding up to individual states. Given the low levels of motorization, they paved some interurban roads and highways to cope with cars and trucks. Civil engineers and their organizations hailed roadbuilding as necessary and inevitable and a lobby for a national highway network emerged, as chapter two will show. But all of these efforts remained inconclusive.

Did roadmindedness extend to organized, self-professed nature enthusiasts? Conservationists, of course, used road and rail to explore the landscapes they cherished, but they were uncertain whether expanding access through easier transportation would be good or bad, for them and for nature. In 1901, John Muir, the founder of the Sierra Club and an eloquent apostle of the wilderness movement, was happy to observe that “all the Western mountains are still rich in wildness, and by means of good roads are being brought nearer civilization every year.”30 By 1914, an umbrella organi-
zation for the preservation of historic monuments and the conservation of nature had established a simple dichotomy between contemporaneous technology and the landscape. Decrying the “mutilation and disfigurement of notable features of the natural landscape,” the group opined that recent developments in the physical sciences and in engineering had led to a “commercial assault” on nature: “In older times the highways generally followed natural grades and curved around hills and other obstacles. Today, the engineer draws a straight line, and blasts his way along the shortest distance between two points. The highway and the railway defy Nature and go where they will.” This wholesale condemnation of “the engineer” would flatter the self-image of the educated middle classes as wardens of culture and nature; some of those engineers, as we will see, tried very hard not to live up to the stereotype. Road enthusiasts, in return, often praised roads as a new way to bring urbanites into nature, with one claiming in the mid-1920s that “folks who ten years ago were unfamiliar with grass except as it grew in parks can now distinguish instantly the difference between poison ivy and the trumpet vine.” Muir’s surprising embrace of roads and the categorical rejection of road and rail as impositions by other nature lovers were two ends of a spectrum. As mostly middle-class urbanites, environmentalists needed infrastructures to reach their destinations, which were increasingly marked by the absence of such technologies. These tensions remained and contributed to the debates over and the design of scenic roads. Muir’s statement points to a possible unity of roads and scenic exploration, which the National Park Service would later promote in much more pronounced ways. Roadmindedness provoked and contained contradictions.

Roadmindedness across the Atlantic

While such manifestations of roadmindedness appeared to be exclusively national, they were part of international networks and exchanges. State sponsors and planners eagerly celebrated roads and highways as vernacular, national, or even nationalistic achievements, yet professionals such as civil engineers, landscape architects, and urban planners were keenly aware of developments in other countries. They incorporated international design ideas and management techniques. In the process, they elevated roadmindedness to a mindset and practice whose core elements circulated freely across the Atlantic. Yet, it took on specific national forms whenever it was realized. This inherent tension between international exchange and national
expression was not exclusive to roads and highways, of course. But the politics of expertise mattered in specific terms. In the sphere of international knowledge circulation, roadmindedness was an interrelated process driven by experts who portrayed themselves as apolitical. Scientific and engineering journals, papers, visits, and international conferences were conduits for exchanging ideas, policies, and administrative procedures, and reinforced a collective identity of road planners as improving society by undergirding car-based mobility.

One institution stands out: the Permanent International Association of Road Congresses (PIARC). It became one of the premier arenas for road experts from Europe and the United States to trade knowledge and practices through its publications and gatherings. PIARC meetings were elaborate, state-sponsored affairs with opportunities to compare plans, projects, publicity campaigns, and finished roads. Delegates, mostly civil engineers and government officials, represented their home countries, took notes on reports from other nations, and went on tours of roads in the host nation. France, with its centralized planning and tradition of elite schools, had been prominent in producing and codifying knowledge on highway building since the early modern period. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the first PIARC meeting was held in Paris in 1908. At this gathering, the delegates spent a lot of time worrying about the dust problem caused by urban automobiles in the countryside. Bluntly, the chief engineer for the city of New York rejected the “segregation of motor traffic” by “dustless” roads exclusively for cars. They would be too expensive to build, he argued, and make motoring unaffordable for most Americans, as the cost would have to be passed on to them through taxes. For the American representative to the first transnational road congress, a sole-purpose road was a curiosity, not a solution to a traffic problem. While his East Coast colleague castigated special roads, Samuel Lancaster of Oregon participated in the same conference, but he did not leave a trace in the conference proceedings other than his name. It is clear, though, that he sought and found inspiration in Switzerland, France, and Italy, where he studied coastal and lakeside highways during his European trip. Eight years later, the highly referential Columbia River Highway opened to traffic.

The 1913 PIARC meeting in London was marked by more calls for new roads. Sir George S. Gibb, chairman of Britain’s Imperial Road Board and of the congress, noted the “startling suddenness” of the appearance of auto-
mobiles in his opening address. “The old roads can no longer satisfy the new needs,” Gibb claimed, thus marking the transition of the Road Congress from a forum for collecting expertise to a group defined by engineering and political advocacy. It became a body that described an urgent problem and offered solutions to it in the form of more roads. Cloaked in the language of expertise and disinterested advice, the proceedings of these congresses speak to a deeply political act of expanding roads and redefining them. According to one historian, PIARC became a lobby for roads. Reports and presentations at the meetings encompassed a large variety of technical issues, while the overwhelming message became clear: the rise of the automobile called for massive investment in new roads. While other international organizations pursued similar messages, PIARC appears to have been particularly steadfast in its message of roadmindedness.

By the time a PIARC congress came to Washington, DC, in 1930, a British delegate indicated that the publications of the US Bureau of Public Roads had familiarized non-Americans with stateside roads. Although it was the first visit to the United States for many delegates, they had already seen the country through the eyes of the Bureau. Publications, in other words, had helped to establish the “highway fraternity” that Thomas H. MacDonald invoked when greeting the delegates. A fraternity it was indeed, since female civil engineers, small in number as they were, were not represented among the delegates at all. During post-conference excursions, the sheer number of cars and the mileage of roads in the United States left a deep impression on European delegates. In professional terms, they also noted the comprehensive nature of road planning and the institutionalized expertise of road engineers. The Americans presented urban, suburban, and rural roads. Much to the astonishment of Europeans, traffic meant almost exclusively motorized traffic; all other kinds had vanished: “In the countryside, we did not meet any pedestrians, nor bicyclists, and horse-drawn vehicles were nonexistent. The roads are owned uniquely by automobiles,” according to one astonished French reporter. The federal government showed off construction sites of its signature scenic road of the time, the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway.

Thinking about roads and debating their scope, design, and location had become a standard exercise for planners and politicians by the late 1920s, both in Europe and in the United States. Engineers and planners working at local, regional, national, and international scales preached and practiced
roadmindedness. The roles of government and experts working for it changed to the point where Thomas MacDonald could claim with only some hyperbole: “Thus, the building of highways adequate in character and in extent becomes, next to the education of the child, the greatest public responsibility in all of our, otherwise highly developed nations of this Western Continent.”46 Pedagogy and pavement, in other words, were equally important.

The Culture of Roadmindedness

If roadmindedness was to succeed, it required cultural work, in addition to political and engineering efforts. At first glance, roads “scarcely admit of being treated in that easy, amusing, and instructive manner which less homely subjects might admit of,” as one nineteenth-century writer put it.47 Yet travelogues functioned as one mode of such cultural efforts. Before the interwar roadbuilding boom in the United States, and up until the 1930s in Europe, authors wrote in a jargon of discovery and danger about driving on existing roads, especially when traversing remote areas (in the case of North America) or the Alps (in the case of Europe). The resulting articles and books were entertaining and written for an audience accustomed to exoticizing tales, such as those of Arctic or African expeditions.

Sponsored by a magazine, the New York socialite and writer Emily Post—later to become famous as an authority on etiquette—set out for a road trip from New York to the Pacific in 1916 with her son. A book ensued. For her travels, she chose the most difficult mode, when a train would have whisked her across the continent in comfort. Post encountered a geography of difference. The “magnificent work” of car clubs or highway commissioners in the Midwest made travel easy. Given the absence of fixed roads and bridges in parts of the American Southwest, however, her son gave advice on fording streams.48 The Lincoln Highway was only a chimera in some places. All in all, the picture of Post and her car parked on a Pacific beach made the point most vividly: traversing the United States coast to coast could be done, but only with difficulty.49

In fact, the American West was more exotic for the wealthy New Yorker than Europe. In her book, Post established her motorist bona fides by assuring her readers that she had “driven across Europe again and again” and claimed to have made it from the Baltic to the Adriatic in 1898 “in one of the few first motor-cars ever sold to a private individual. We knew European scenery, roads, stopping-places, by heart.”50 Post’s assurances make her part
of a coterie of travelers and writers who practiced roadmindedness by driving some of the first automobiles on European roads.

One topographical feature between the Baltic and the Adriatic stood out: the Alps. Their peaks and valleys, especially the Swiss ones, loomed large over the cultural work of roadmindedness. Oregon’s Lancaster was not the only one to be enchanted and instructed by this range. In the history of tourism and scenic infrastructures, Switzerland and its mountains figure prominently. International cultural efforts at establishing roadmindedness had an unmistakably Alpine quality to them, especially in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

**Switzerland and Scenic Infrastructures**

Roadmindedness in Switzerland was not simply a result of higher mountains. Its scenic infrastructures were caught up in the country’s early and successful promotion of tourism. While this republic is certainly well endowed with peaks of impressive heights, it did not become a vacation destination without some other advantages—and some work. Switzerland’s relative proximity to major European urban centers, its eager embrace of tourists, and its rapid buildup of scenic infrastructures contributed to its becoming a favorite destination for travelers. After an intense period of railroad construction in Switzerland, neighboring countries built rail- and road-based scenic conveyances as well.

Historians still debate how to chart these developments. Yet, it is clear that Enlightenment “discoveries” contributed to opening the way for haphazard and then growing waves of tourists in Switzerland. The British enthusiasm for the Alps is well known, especially in its mountaineering form. Gaining force in the mid-nineteenth century, climbers and hikers from Britain took to the Alps, supported by rapidly growing infrastructures. The numbers of tourists were such that the Saturday Review decreed as early as 1867—prematurely, as it were—that the Alps were already “used up,” as almost every peak had been climbed. First ascents were no longer available, but personal firsts were.

Jumpstarted by British mountaineers, who conceived of climbing as a middle-class sport, and their Swiss hosts, Swiss tourism infrastructures soon accommodated both the hardy individualist and the comfort-seeking traveler. The railway network grew quickly and extensively, reaching many of the Swiss valleys. Tunneling ensured fast access; the planning and construction
of the Gotthard Tunnel in the late nineteenth century was celebrated as a technological feat, and as an icon of Swiss ingenuity. While these trains followed the valleys and went through the mountains, cable cars, gondolas, and railroad branch lines enabled tourists to forgo the hike and leave the climbing to engines. Such mechanical ascents were both popular and controversial. As one historian argues, they both enabled and conditioned tourism, as some valleys and mountains became accessible by rail and others did not. Locals, after initial opposition, favored those mountaintop projects for the most part; conservationists who aimed to speak for the locals and for nature did not, in union with hikers and mountaineers; and banks and investors often decided whether or not plans became realized.

The rise in the numbers of Alpine tourists and the rise in the height of peaks they could visit without major effort pleased most tourists and the tourism trade. However, two groups in particular objected to the ease of this scenic appropriation. Hikers and climbers could no longer look down upon day-trippers in a literal sense since they had to share coveted peaks with them, but their organizations did so figuratively. Mountaineering built character and human physique, they claimed, while the effortless ascent via modern transportation technology lacked authenticity and was a lesser form of scenic enjoyment.

Together with hikers, conservationists, although often ambivalent about the effects of tourism on the Alpine landscape, were most predictably incensed by proposals for building cable cars and other means of easy access to mountaintops. In a 1908 publication, a Bavarian conservationist compared different ways of reaching the summits: “While it is an experience for the one who has made the achievement of reaching a proud summit through one’s own strength, it is only a naked fact for the majority of those who let themselves be lifted up by steam or electricity.” The latter mode was clearly trivial in comparison to relying on personal vigor and bodily strength, according to this observer. Probably the harshest indictment of cable cars sprang from the pen of Ernst Rudorff, a composer and one of the founders of the German conservationist movement. Incensed by the construction of cable cars and mountain railways in Switzerland, he unsuccessfully sought a ban in Germany, where he claimed only a small minority, whom he called “traveling rabble” (Reisepöbel), would use them.

Perhaps the epitome of such easy access to the peaks is the railway to the Jungfraujoch mountain in Switzerland, which still boasts Europe’s highest
railway station at an altitude of 11,332 feet (3,454 meters). Travelers en route spend most of their time in tunnels, only to be rewarded by high Alpine panoramas and creature comforts at the top. These tunnels were hugely expensive and very dangerous to build. This monument to technified mountains opened in 1912 and has remained a major tourist attraction. The Swiss and their guests developed a strong penchant for cog railways, cable cars, and luxurious, high Alpine hotels. The Swiss mountain landscape received extensive scenic infrastructures, thus making it a reference point for the promoters of roadmindedness.\(^{59}\)

Even the railroad-loving Swiss did not overlook roads. For the most part, they left the lowlands to the rails and expanded or upgraded the existing road network in the mountains, where few Swiss lived but tourists dwelled. In the early 1860s, the Swiss national government decided to sponsor the construction of a cross-shaped set of four roads for commercial and military purposes.\(^{60}\) One of them, the Axenstraße, became internationally famous because of its galleries and inspired the Columbia River Highway.

Such touristic success found both imitators and critics. In what set the tone for many publications to follow, the English climber and writer Leslie Stephen dubbed the Alps, and especially the Swiss Alps, the “playground of Europe” in 1871. It was, however, a playground with its own rules and marks of distinction. Stephen set up a stark contrast between mountaineers and “ordinary travelers,” since the former were willing to exert physical efforts and take risks.\(^{61}\) The rewards, then, were all the greater for those who climbed into “the farthest recesses” of the Alps: “And without seeing them, I maintain that no man has really seen the Alps.”\(^{62}\) For Stephen, where and how one visited the Alps was related to social status: “The bases of the mountains are immersed in a form of cockneyism—fortunately a shallow deluge—whilst their summits rise high into the bracing air, where everything is pure and poetical.”\(^{63}\) Mountaineering as a way of rising above the masses, both literally and figuratively, has been a quest for many of its practitioners since Stephen’s times. Gender, class, nationality, and speed of travel mattered: Stephen mocked “ladies in costumes, heavy German professors, Americans doing the Alps at a gallop, Cook’s tourists.”\(^{64}\) But the masses had a way of catching up with the Stephens of this world. The deluge turned out to be anything but shallow. More and more visitors came, and increasingly, they used scenic infrastructures rather than climbed.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, early motorists in the Alps
answered Stephen’s quest for authenticity with a cultural appropriation of their own. The savoir faire displayed by the urban middle and upper-middle classes when it came to food, lodging, and dress extended to motoring, and especially to motoring in difficult, mountainous terrain. Guidebooks and manuals recommended demanding roads (for the adventurous driver) or scenic ones (for the sensual driver of a slower bent). If the difficult met the aesthetically rewarding, all the better. This roadmindedness has left a considerable legacy in guidebooks and testimonials.

Initially, these motorists traveled on existing Alpine roads, especially the ones traversing peaks. Alpine passes for connecting the lowlands north and south of the Alps were well established. By the early modern period, nine main passes had handled most of the transalpine traffic and commerce. Some were upgraded for more traffic in the early nineteenth century. With the growth of commerce and tourism, guidebooks effectively channelized trips on these roads and the views of these travelers, as the recommended avenues of sights were but few.

Stories of such trips circulated widely. When automotive pioneers told tales about their trips, travel in the Alps was a favorite genre. One of the most widely read accounts in the German-speaking world was the 1903 travelogue by the writer Otto Julius Bierbaum of a “sensitive trip” from Germany to Southern Italy and back. Bierbaum claims that he (or more accurately, his chauffeur) was the first one to drive up the Gotthard Pass road in Switzerland in an automobile. It was one of the many highways built during the early nineteenth century for strategic and economic purposes, only to be eclipsed in significance by the railroads a few decades later. Bierbaum reports that it took him all of nine hours to travel eighty-five miles (136 kilometers) of mountain roads, as he relied on a one-cylinder, eight-horsepower car. Rather than describing the mountain scenery in detail, Bierbaum’s account emphasizes the slow pace of the trip. After being fined by a Swiss policeman for illegal driving and admonished to drive more slowly, the author added almost petulantly that he did not need the advice “as it would be a sin to hurry here.”

Such travel accounts promoted a cultural validation of roadmindedness. The bourgeois preference for unhurried driving reflected a distaste for the scheduled experiences of the train and the mixing of passengers from different classes. In the case of early mountain driving, the thrill of adventurism was added, as it was uncertain whether road and motor conditions (together
with the skills of the driver or chauffeur) would allow the trip to be completed. As late as 1958, the British writer Hugh Merrick classified the Stelvio road, another remnant from the early nineteenth century, as one that should only be driven by “experienced drivers for its own sake.” Not least because it was the “loftiest” in Europe, the Stelvio received more written praise than most other pre-automotive mountain roads. Its hairpin turns stood out. Merrick was one of the most eloquent observers to praise the sport of mountain driving:

Wriggling and writhing, darting and dodging, now this way now that, by a continuous bank of walled hairpins, now built out one above the other like the landings of a giant spiral staircase, now spaced out at the end of long straight sectors where it clings to exiguous ledges, the narrow white ribbon of this incredible road literally slashes its way over a height of 3,000 ft. of precipitous mountainside in fifty looping, swirling bends which leave the beholder almost dizzy as he tries to sort out the interweaving pattern of its bewildering course.

The pleasures and pitfalls of switchbacks have rarely been described more evocatively. Especially before the 1920s, driving on these roads required skill and constant attention to one’s environs, challenged and reinforced the sense of masculinity of these motorists, and rewarded them with a sense of technological mastery and plenty of views. While roads in the lowlands could be lovely, even picturesque, Alpine highways were demanding and grandiose to the same degree. As late as the 1950s, Merrick claimed, “The main thrill is still there, and each crossing is still an undertaking and an adventure.” He also compared Alpine driving with mountaineering, did not find it wanting, and deemed it a “different but complementary form of high-mountain travel.”

In these accounts, roadmindedness possessed a sportive quality. This was especially true for roads such as the Stelvio whose raison d’être had been commercial or military, and which predated the automobile. Steep gradients and hairpin turns had suited carriages or animal-powered carts well enough. Drivers of early cars could not always turn corners on the first try, were wary of rolling down the hill when trying again, and could not always rely on their brakes. Once the trip was completed without incident, writers felt a sense of accomplishment and mastery. Built in the early nineteenth century by the Austrian Empire to connect its provinces of Tyrol and Lombardy by carriage travel, the Stelvio, with its eighty hairpin curves on both
sides of the mountain, allowed motorists to reach an altitude of more than nine thousand feet (2,757 meters). A 1911 guidebook claimed that “every summer the road is traversed by cars in plenty.” Its author also warned drivers not to overheat their engines when driving, as doing so led to many engine failures. But it was worth the effort and potential damage, since “on no other road can such magnificent views be enjoyed.” Of course, tourists could ascend mountain peaks with less skill and effort by taking trains and gondolas, but motorists insisted that those methods were less sporting.

This group of motorists embraced uncertainty. In fact, the less predictable the trip was, the better. The first handful of years both before and after 1900 offered drivers plenty of chances to be first in ascending particular peaks. The relatively weak engines, dearth of gas stations or repair shops, and novelty of the experience turned the entire effort into the sport that upper-middle-class pioneer motorists were after. Looking back in 1913, a Frankfurt driver reminisced about a trip undertaken just thirteen years earlier. With a 4.5-horsepower engine under the hood, the trip to the top of the Stelvio Pass had taken two days. “This was still a true sport,” the writer re-
membered; his trepidation had made it so. He claimed to have been the first motorist to ascend the Stelvio’s switchbacks so eloquently described by Merrick. (It is safe to assume that these claims to fame outnumber the roads and peaks of the Alps.)

Solitude in motoring was another feat: in 1900, while adding about 2,500 miles (4,000 kilometers) in northern Italy and Tyrol to his odometer, our Frankfurt driver had encountered only one other car. By 1913, he claimed, one would have to travel to the farthest reaches of the Balkans to escape other motorists. The only relief after traversing a pass was realizing that one’s car had not been dented by another one. Making it across was now a given. They also put an experiential gap between early adopters and those of the second generation. The former had to endure unpredictability; the latter could rely on larger cars with stronger engines, better brakes, and more roadside services. What united both was a preference, at least when writing, in framing the road trip through the lens of landscape. In the process, they created their version of roadmindedness.

In the interwar period, the German upper-middle-class motoring journal Motor-Tourist was especially outspoken in its advocacy of car-oriented landscapes. In 1929, the journal sponsored a competition entitled “How do We See the Landscape?” to enable contestants to explain in writing and by taking pictures “how they are proficient to enjoy the beauties of cities and countryside and to feel their cultural and artistic attractions.” The idea was to describe what one saw while motoring. Seeing was the motorist’s preoccupation and calling, since they had to pay attention to traffic and surroundings. But there was more: “Images and images hurry past him. The world becomes a scenery for him, he drives past [as if] in mid-air. In the morning, [he is] still in his daily city routines, amongst gigantic mountain by noon, and by evening at the ocean perhaps, at a lake, in the lowlands!” The dynamic variety of the trip, with its smorgasbord of images seen through the windshield, found its match in such breathless narration.

In such travelogues, references to two other twentieth-century technologies, aviation and cinema, were commonplace. Flying was out of reach even for most of the wealthy readers of the journal, but the cinematic experience of plot narration through imagery was affordable and had changed sensory patterns. Rather than simply replicating it when driving, these motorists aimed
to be their own directors and editors. Again and again, motorist-writers invoked the post-railroad privilege of automotive agency, of choosing to drive or to stop—whenever and however long they pleased. Fittingly, one historian notes the “combination of cinematic perception while driving and of the proliferation of cinematic modes of seeing through movies,” which affected mountain driving in particular.

This individual mastery over the road trip rested on a different sense of time. An account of a trip over an Austrian mountain road stressed that motorists should not worry about being stuck in the mountains or not reaching their destination for the day. What mattered was the “vivid memory of this beautiful valley; he who does not take it along will regret it at home. But it takes time to hold on to this memory.” For these travelers, unhurried, deliberately slow travel was preferable to speedy jaunts as only the former would resonate on a deeper emotional level. While being able to go fast, these tourists and writers celebrated stretching out travel time. Such new temporalities existed side by side with and were a rejection of a culture of speed at racing events and on ever-faster trains.

Individual reports are filled with descriptions of the landscapes traversed, making the road trip a non-productive leisure activity for affluent motorists. In addition, the motoring club behind Motor-Tourist organized annual outings for which the slow-paced appreciation of local landscapes was the prime motivation. While car races in the lowlands and on select slopes drew huge crowds appreciating the thrill and danger of speed, middle-class motorists traversing mountain peaks by themselves or in small groups celebrated unhurried travel. These travelers collected road experiences and traded stories about especially difficult, especially remote, or especially scenic roads.

Tourism promoters in the Alps paid attention. Although they appreciated the well-heeled motorists and their disposable incomes, the idea of 1920s motorists on mid-nineteenth-century roads was not well suited to their vision of Alpine tourism. Local mayors and hotel owners—but also national parliaments—engaged in a veritable international competition over scenic roads. While the landscapes of tourism, in particular Alpine peaks, were presented as static and frozen in place, access to them varied greatly and changed rapidly. Early mountaineers relied on physical skill, good boots, and knowledgeable guides; later tourists utilized trains, cable cars, and increasingly roads, in an ever-growing panoply of technologically enhanced consumption choices available to anyone who could pay for them.
kling of Alpine scenic infrastructures was highly controversial, with some Alpinists deriding the less-sporting class of tourists.

Some mountaineers, however, embraced automobiles and even built roads for them in their version of roadmindedness. When South Tyrol was still Austrian, the local section leader of the German and Austrian Alpine Association in Meran-Merano, a hotel owner named Theodor Christomannos, successfully persuaded the Vienna government and local sponsors to fund a “Dolomite Road” (Dolomitenstraße) leading from Bozen-Bolzano to Cortina d'Ampezzo over a distance of 70 miles (112 kilometers). It opened in 1909, when automobiles were still rare. Through tenacious lobbying, Christomannos found money to create a “showpiece” of both the Dolomite peaks and of roadbuilding.87 While the road served primarily tourists, the road’s promoters did not cease to point out the military relevance of such a connection. They turned out to be correct.88 Once finished, the road was utilized during the fierce battles over the Alps in World War I.89 After serving as a token of pride for Austrian tourism promoters, the highway became a beacon for Italian tourism as South Tyrol changed hands after the war.

This sense of nationally charged and technologically enhanced scenery was just as strong in the French project of the “Route des Alpes.” Like all the other Alpine highway plans, its promoters made sure not to cross national boundaries, lest tourists be led astray. As early as 1909, the Touring Club of France, the country’s organization of wealthy urban motorists, had commenced construction of a high Alpine connection from the French part of Lake Geneva all the way to the Mediterranean, over a distance of some 435 miles (700 kilometers). Existing roads and some newly constructed ones should form a branded mountain-to-ocean connection. The touring club’s ally was a major railroad company. It saw the “Route des Alpes” as an opportunity to transport tourists in open-top buses that met them at nearby railroad stations. In addition, scenery and roadbuilding were to receive the blessing of the nation-state. Raymond Poincaré, the French president, had planned to lead the opening ceremony for a stretch of the road in August of 1914, but he had to tend to more pressing international matters. Instead of tourists, mountain infantry soldiers used the road and explored the peaks of Southeastern France during World War I. Construction recommenced when hostilities ended, and finally, one of Poincaré’s successors, Albert Lebrun, opened the highest paved mountain pass in the Alps, the Col de l’Iseran in
Savoy, at 9,068 feet (2,764 meters) above sea level, as part of the Alpine route in 1937, after several years of construction.\textsuperscript{90}

Not to be left behind, Austria presented several scenic roads to its citizens and to the world during the interwar period. The demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire translated into a dramatically smaller territory with fewer Alpine peaks, given the loss of South Tyrol and Slovenia. To make the highest mountain of the country, the Großglockner (12,461 feet, or 3,798 meters), accessible with a high-altitude road was both a patriotic and technologically daring project, as one historian writes. Its main promoter, the civil engineer and mountaineer Franz Wallack, presented plans for this scenic infrastructure in 1924. They generated lots of attention and debate, fraught with symbolic meaning as the proposal was. The price tag for the project was extremely high, however. Only the authoritarian Dollfuß regime was willing to provide major resources for the road, which opened in 1935 with a maximum elevation of 8,215 feet (2,504 meters), as discussed in chapter three. It also sponsored the construction of a smaller, more accessible road in the vicinity of Vienna, the “Viennese High-Altitude Road” (Wiener Höhenstraße). National identity was to be caught up in technological symbolism with these projects, whose long planning periods were followed by many non-Austrian observers and inspired competitors and would-be competitors.\textsuperscript{91}

All of these projects were decidedly national in origin, motivation, and meaning. Whether in Austria, Switzerland, France, or Italy, tourism managers were careful both to attract tourist traffic and to retain it within their country’s respective borders. In addition to obvious commercial interests, issues of national identity were tied to mountain scenery and automotive access to it, especially in Austria and Switzerland. There, territory and tourism defined each other to a large degree. Roads could be built as forward-looking and economically sensible monuments, despite their high costs. The triumphalism of contemporaneous accounts (and of parts of the historical literature) masks the degree to which these projects were initially controversial. Occasional grumbling from observers regarding cost and purpose was buried by a wave of enthusiasm. In terms of their role for tourism, Alpine highways created unique destinations for motorists and, thus, reasons to visit. At the time of their planning and construction, the hoped-for visitors were middle-class tourists from European metropoles in their own automobiles.\textsuperscript{92}
Accounts of these scenic infrastructures show how they relate to other forms of movement. In the 1930s, an English preservationist who preferred hiking to driving quipped that whiskey-sipping motorists were “all liver and no legs.” Such critiques of new modes of traveling and tourism are quite common in the history of mobility. Generally speaking, older forms of mobility—and especially hiking, since its technologies are as ancient as shoes—are seen as more authentic; more comfortable and faster tours appear to alienate the travelers from their surroundings and are imbued with a sense of loss. In the case of cars, however, the most recent technology appeared to bring not a deeper loss of one’s perceptive abilities, but rather a regaining of the sense of landscape.

The touristic roadmindedness in Austria and Switzerland, with its sporadic ventures and scenic goals, had a counterpart in the less exalted but more grounded kind of roadmindedness in the German states during the interwar period. The national government abstained from planning for larger road schemes, given the low numbers of cars on the roads. But engineers and local politicians, especially those from urbanized regions, began to think about reorganizing roads along national lines. The Berlin government eschewed financing new highways, but by early 1932, important trunk roads were classified as long-distance roads. Roads were ranked in a hierarchy of importance. Civil engineers founded a technical clearinghouse and road lobby; one of its most visible members echoed MacDonald’s claim of the economic importance of roads, but with a slight twist: a relatively poor country such as Germany could not afford the luxury of bad roads, these promoters claimed. Roads would stimulate the economy and their expenses would pay for themselves, they argued, as they tried to overcome the reluctance of politicians and administrators to invest in these infrastructures. Very little came of these plans. As chapter two will show, such occasional and aspirational efforts received support only with the rise of the Nazi dictatorship, which threw economic caution to the wind.

Roadmindedness and Institutions: The National Park Service

European projects in the realm of scenic infrastructure, especially in the Alps, met observers, imitators, and competitors in the United States. Roadmindedness needed enthusiasts and cultural ambassadors; it also needed institutions and funding. The cooperative roadbuilding program by American states and the federal Bureau of Public Roads was based on a utilitarian
version of roadmindedness. While Bureau engineers were deliberating how to build roads and where to put them, another institution of the federal government was much more sanguine: the National Park Service. During the interwar period, it put scenic roads near the top of its agenda, provided copious funds, and built such roads quickly and extensively. The appeal of new roads in scenic regions was not lost on American planners, tourism boosters, and cultural observers. In fact, European exemplars of such roads figured prominently in stateside discussions about the cultural politics of scenery and tourism. First, they were role models; by the interwar period, a movement for domestic tourism included an emphasis on homegrown roads; and by the 1930s, European roads were seen as imitators of American ones. For the American parkway movement, European Alpine highways were curiosities, with fewer democratic qualities than domestic roads, given the lower rates of motorization.

Despite their internationally circulating design features, such roads embodied ideas about landscape and nation. For the Park Service, scenic roads and parkways were to be an expression of Americanness. The idea that landscapes were building blocks for nationhood was, of course, no less foreign to Americans than to Europeans. Landscapes from the Hudson Valley to Yosemite, from the picturesque to the sublime, figured prominently in the nation’s understanding of its role among nations.97 Given the country’s vast territory, agricultural riches, and westward expansion, artistic landscapes played a crucial role in the way urbanites understood less populated regions of the country. Historians have pointed to a direct link between the popularity of landscape paintings for middle-class urban households and the nineteenth-century movement to establish national parks in the American West.98 They have also highlighted how railroads, as privately owned transportation companies, pursued commercial interests by linking population centers to the remote parks.99 In some contemporaneous accounts, the majesty of Western landscapes would make up for the fact that the United States did not possess centuries-old cathedrals, castles, or city centers, which became markers of nationhood in Europe.100

Scenic roads embodied these ideas in a new form. An important specimen of this nationally charged practice of scenic driving was the Redwood Highway, among giant coastal redwoods in Northern California’s Humboldt County. Voters approved a bond issue for the road in 1909; construction began soon after; one of its sections was built with prison labor; and the
entire road opened in 1923. When planning other forested roads, the California Highway Commission typically received freshly logged right-of-way from the respective counties that had sold the lumber for profit. In the case of the Redwood Highway, however, the Commission asked for and received a swath of land with trees still standing. It made for more impressive driving and a shaded sylvan experience. This (more expensive) practice of incorporating a beauty strip found many imitators over the course of the twentieth century, to the point of cartoons mocking it by the late century.

In the late 1910s, conservationists from the Save the Redwoods League were among the promoters of the road. The Redwood Highway would bring attention and visitors to their cause of protecting tree stands. Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, had been among the founding members of the Redwoods League. Madison Grant, equally known as a conservationist and eugenicist, expected that rising numbers of tourists would appreciate redwood trees while driving; the Save the Redwoods League hitched its wagon to auto tourism. The Redwood Highway was to highlight American nature and the ancient trees, the “purity” of which was especially important during a time of massive immigration and cultural anxiety among old elites. References to Europe were implicit, as the trees became stand-ins for an immutable American identity.

Being a tourist, in this regard, was more than an experience in relaxation. The “See America First” campaign of the early twentieth century sought to increase not only the number of domestic trips, but to raise a collective appreciation of nature and culture that was understood to be American. “See Europe if you will, but see America first,” exhorted an ex-governor of Utah and president of the Salt Lake City Commercial Club, in a particularly bold 1906 speech, in which he asserted: “Don’t be hypnotized by weird tales of European travel. There is not an attraction in the Old World that cannot be duplicated and discounted by the phenomena of America.” The United States was the more pleasant place to spend one’s dollars, as well, as domestic tourists would not be “hound to death by a horde of mendicants.” While clearly using the Old World as its reference point, Western tourism boosters claimed that the natural scenery of the United States surpassed that of Europe. Not only was an overseas vacation unnecessary because of superior (or at least equal) American landscape; exploring the West instead of traveling across the Atlantic was also seen as a patriotic act—imbibing
American nature instilled and reinforced American values which, by definition, European destinations could not.

Originally, the See America First movement sang the praise of the Western United States, scenically endowed with the older national parks of Yellowstone and Yosemite, among several others. But spending one’s vacation dollars—assuming one had any to spare—domestically, rather than abroad, became more than a regional catchphrase after World War I. Local tourism boosters all over America were all too eager to portray their destinations as patriotic, as well as accessible. A veritable outdoor industry began to emerge in the interwar years. It sought to regularize and capture automotive tourists, who had been exploring the countryside in increasing numbers. In addition to local and regional efforts to attract tourists, the federal government provided support in the form of a quasi-touristic federal agency, the National Park Service. Its vision of tourism in the interwar years featured cars and roads as the coming means of transportation and scenic enjoyment.

During this period, publicly visible federal roadbuilding in recreational areas more often than not bore the stamp of the Park Service. Founded in 1916, the agency oversaw national parks mostly in the American West, as well as various historical sites. Its dual (and often contradictory) mission was to preserve parks and monuments and to make them accessible. In the case of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, access meant giving tours and interpreting the history of the site; in the case of Western parks such as Yellowstone, which were hundreds, if not thousands, of miles from the population centers of the country, access meant building roads. Especially under the leadership of Stephen Mather, the Park Service championed the idea of getting tourists to its parks in automobiles. Although railroads had been crucial for the establishment of these parks in the nineteenth century, Mather pushed his young agency to transform the parks for the automotive age. Little, he argued, had been done “to enable the motorists to have the greater use of these playgrounds [national parks] which they demand and deserve.” This was more than a matter of logistics, of moving visitors to the sites—and sights—and back home. The goal was to radically alter the experience of national parks. Instead of arriving with others by train, staying in a lodge, and going on excursions, either on foot or on horseback, visitors would arrive in their own automobiles, as families or in other small groups, stay in National
Park Service–managed campsites or small cabins, and tour the parks, mostly while seated in their automobiles.

Mobile landscapes of a different sort emerged. The train trip and the guided tour were to be replaced by cars and road trips. Inside and outside of the parks, landscape was framed through the movement of automobiles. Improved highways would bring more visitors to the parks, thus resulting in their greater popularity and more calls for expanding the park system. Mather aimed to augment the scale and scope of his institution, believed in growth and visions, and neither wanted to nor could shake off the attitude of the growth-oriented industrialist that he had been before joining the federal government. In the context of Mather’s Park Service, growth and success meant more roads. “Making a business out of scenery” was the goal, not just of local and regional tourism boosters (as it had been in Oregon), but of a fledgling federal government agency with an activist leader. In a 1916 article, Robert Sterling Yard, Mather’s publicity person, again referencing the Swiss example, exclaimed:

We want our national parks developed. We want roads and trails like Switzerland’s. We want hotels of all prices from lowest to highest. We want comfortable public camps in sufficient abundance to meet all demands. We want lodges and chalets at convenient intervals commanding the scenic possibilities of all our parks. We want the best and cheapest accommodations for pedestrians and motorists. We want sufficient and convenient transportation at reasonable rates. We want adequate facilities and supplies for camping out at lowest prices. We want good fishing. We want our wild animal life conserved and developed. We want special facilities for nature study.

Although Yard would later regret such sentiments and join the wilderness movement, Mather pursued landscape embellishments via roads, roadside parks, and observation points—to name but three accoutrements—with great vigor. As one historian puts it aptly, “Through the promotion of tourism in the National Parks, scenery itself became a kind of commodity.” In the words of another historian, a “windshield wilderness” emerged. The design, production, branding, and promotion of this commodity was to be firmly in the hands of the Park Service, a touristic agency on a mission.

One of the most visible examples was Mather’s support of a circular “park-to-park highway” that would connect Glacier, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Mt. Rainier National Parks in a grand loop. While local
boosters, including chambers of commerce and tourism managers, advocated and advertised this route, the states along the route were hesitant to pay for new roads for this purpose alone. The National Park Service had jurisdiction only over its own parks. However, this did not stop Mather from loudly and prominently supporting the idea of the park-to-park highway. In a letter, he claimed to have come up with the idea himself in 1915, but left the public promotion to Western boosters. With such a road in place, motorists could visit more national parks in one trip “without hardship,” thus boosting visitation numbers. In 1922, he supported plans for a national park-to-park tour on the auto log of Sequoia National Park. With the support and participation of Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, a group of highway boosters conceived of a park-to-park highway connecting several national parks in the American West. On a publicity tour to seek attention for their cause, the group stops at Sequoia National Park in California and poses on its auto log, a fallen tree converted to a ramp. A. G. Lucier Collection, John T. Hinckley Library, Northwest College, Powell, Wyoming
highway system spanning the entire United States, based on his observation that “travel is based on the enjoyment of scenery.”

This view contrasted with the more utilitarian motivations of the engineers of the Bureau of Public Roads, who favored roadbuilding to alleviate existing congestion and further commerce. This meant roadbuilding in and between urban areas, which for Mather and most of his contemporaries were not scenic by definition. Building roads between cities might or might not lead truck drivers through scenic landscapes, but this was not the main point of consideration for the Bureau engineers.

The Park Service’s expansionist road agenda, however, resulted in an increasing demand for professional experts. Figures such as Samuel Lancaster, a civil engineer moonlighting as an informal landscape architect, were a rare breed by the 1930s. At any rate, the academic training of either profession often discouraged rather than encouraged such interdisciplinary work. Landscape architects sought to distinguish themselves from architects, on the one hand, and mere garden design, on the other hand, in professional terms by stressing the artistic and comprehensive planning quality of their work, while civil engineers of the kind employed by the Bureau sought to distinguish their work by their use of quantitative research methods. This is not to say that only landscape architects would know how to fit a road into the landscape, or that only civil engineers would know the appropriate curve radius or gradient of a road—far from it. Rather, by the 1920s, expertise over these matters was, to a large degree, a question of drawing professional boundaries and, subsequently, finding properly defined common areas.

Given this background, historians have remarked upon a 1926 interbureau agreement between the National Park Service and the Bureau of Public Roads as a turning point for scenic roads in the United States. It was more than simply an accord for pooling resources from both parties for the purposes of road planning and construction. Codifying existing cooperation at Glacier National Park and elsewhere, this contract gave the Park Service control over the questions of where, when, and how park roads would be built. The Bureau was responsible for surveys and for providing building specifications in contracts for private companies, which it also supervised. Historian Ethan Carr argues that this agreement “structured decades of cooperation between the two federal bureaus.” It also cemented the predominance of the landscape architects and the Park Service and relegated the Bureau to a secondary role. Professionally and organizationally speaking,
landscape design and landscaping roads in national parks became the domain of landscape architects, with aid from civil engineers for the latter. Although Bureau engineers might have disliked parkways in general because of their prohibition of common-carrier traffic, working with the Park Service on park roads and parkways gave them an opportunity to plan and build roads when a national interstate highway system had only the slimmest of chances of being funded by Congress.

The National Park Service promoted and built roads with scenic features extensively in its parks. It was also instrumental in developing the idea of parkways on a national level. These distinct roads feature prominently in the history of scenic driving. Limited to automobiles, their function was not simply to transport drivers and passengers, but to immerse them in the landscapes surrounding the road. More than any other federal agency, the Park Service embraced parkways. These types of roads gained prominence in the interwar period, with their divided traffic lanes, exit and entry ramps, and avoidance of at-level crossings. Their pedigree pointed to urban design and civic planning. The landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted first coined the term “parkway” in 1868, in conjunction with his plans for Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York. Primarily built for carriages, it had as few intersections as possible. It was designed as the unity of roadbed and adjacent trees and shrubs, as a “narrow, elongated park.” Neither commercial traffic nor trolleys were allowed.

The meaning of parks underwent important changes in the nineteenth century, as the historian David Schuyler has argued. Instead of urban “associational and educational” spaces, parks were increasingly conceived as a “naturalistic landscape.”122 Parkways ensured the proper aesthetic movement through these naturalistic spaces, removed as they were from commercial activity and productive areas. These principles were maintained as the parkway—a way through the park or from park to park—became increasingly used for automobiles. The historian Clay McShane argues that the prohibition of common-carrier traffic on the parkways assured class segregation as well as the appropriate natural feel; social and environmental decisions were intertwined in the history of these roads.123 Increasingly, some of the design features of urban parkways were utilized for extra-urban parkways. Large rights-of-way enabled planners to physically separate and to visually screen the roadway from surrounding areas. The road itself was adapted to landform through a curvilinear alignment that preserved scenic
features, such as streams and hills. Also, parkways introduced the idea of limited points of access, separate alignment for lanes running in opposite directions, and amenities such as roadside parks. Billboards and unchecked roadside development were the archenemy of parkway planners: hot dog stands with garish advertising became proverbial in the planning literature as examples of unsightly and unwanted intrusions into the landscape. Instead, the idea of the parkway was to gain as much control over the road and the roadside as possible—an idea that led to many conflicts.

Major metropolitan centers such as Detroit, Minneapolis, New York, and Chicago extended their network of urban and suburban roads throughout the 1920s, whether they were urban boulevards, parkways under the
jurisdiction of local park authorities, or federally funded state highways. To motorists, of course, these classifications made little difference. Planners expected and encouraged movement in and out of the urban centers, as well as traffic between suburban areas, thus creating a spiderweb of roads. Driving for pleasure became both possible and popular; in 1930, a Chicago area planner stated that the “only days of real congestion” on roads in the region were Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. “Much of the traffic has no definite objective, and is contributed largely by persons out for a pleasure drive in a general direction from one to five or six hours.” Such a statement is all the more remarkable given the economic context: apparently, enough Chicagoans could afford to take their automobiles for recreational rides to cause traffic jams during the onset of what became known as the Great Depression. Pleasure driving had become an amenity in the more affluent urban and suburban parts of the United States.

As the extent of roads grew and their cultural meanings changed, roadmindedness became firmly established. Many of the road-centered narratives of the interwar years make roads into subjects of monumental importance that need to be rescued from ignorance: “The Road [sic] is one the great fundamental institutions of mankind. We forget this because we take it for granted,” exhorted the French-English writer Hilaire Belloc in a treatise published in 1923 and sponsored by the British Reinforced Concrete Engineering Company. Belloc stated that, after many changes to and emanating from the highway, another turning point was now upon his countrymen. Melding a historical survey focused on England with a look toward the future, Belloc concludes with a blatant example of technological determinism: the internal combustion engine “will compel us to new roads,” and they would have to be arterial and reserved for automobiles. He appears to be certain about the powers of this technology. Belloc’s output as a writer made the road treatise disappear under a torrent of other, more controversial publications; but it stands as a witness to the ways in which interested parties could create a new awareness for “the road” as an issue of cultural and political significance in the interwar period. It was sufficiently novel and noteworthy for a writer of Belloc’s stature.

Through the work of its literary, political, and administrative champions, roadmindedness had established itself as a marker of modernity by the 1920s, in both Germany and the United States. It was aspirational in the
former and resulted in extensive planning and construction in the latter. Based on the international circulation of knowledge, the relationship between scenery and infrastructures was well examined, well documented, and increasingly well funded, at least in the United States and a number of Alpine locations. As was the case with tourism in general, Switzerland proved to be the forerunner and reference point for scenic infrastructures. Without fail, promoters of similar efforts elsewhere invoked Switzerland and its many edifices for more than a century. The small Alpine country became synonymous with technologically enhanced access to mountains and scenery in general.

While roadmindedness grew in significance, different groups and institutions pursued varying agendas and overlapping but distinct ideas. As a lobbying effort by interested parties such as civil engineers and landscape architects, it was an effort in professional politics and in establishing new and growing areas for employment. Roads, and especially scenic infrastructures, acquired new meanings as well. Rather than an ancient institution serving humans and animals on the move by themselves or in various vehicles, roads came to embody a twentieth-century version of industrial modernity in the realm of transportation: automobiles and new highways. They promised a cleaner and less hurried version of moving about, one that allowed for immersion in nature rather than speeding by it. In the eyes of their promoters, scenic roads could mend what railroads had ruptured.

Scenic infrastructures were not new in the interwar period, but the focus on scenic roads in the United States and Germany was. The touristic appropriation of scenery featured prominently, which helps to explain the outsize importance of Switzerland. But the aims of the interwar roadminded movement were much bigger. Its goal was not just to present beauty spots in isolated locations, but to remake the relationships between humans and the environment by implanting roadmindedness firmly, and by creating even more extensive scenic road infrastructures.