During World War I, two landscape architects, an American and a German, served the armies of their respective countries in France: Gilmore D. Clarke (1892–1982) and Alwin Seifert (1890–1972). They never met on the battlefield. Instead of fighting with weapons, both helped to design military infrastructures as part of their service. After the war, they went on to design roads in their home countries and achieved considerable public recognition for their efforts to blend highways into the surrounding scenery. The degree to which they led parallel lives is remarkable. In the United States and Germany, Clarke and Seifert are most readily associated with the twentieth-century idea of marrying roads and landscapes, with landscape architects officiating at the scene. In political terms, their careers diverged dramatically: Clarke is best known for his design of regional parkways in the Northeast of the United States during the interwar period, and for participating in both the rise and the fall of Robert Moses’s public works projects in New York; the high point of Seifert’s career was his involvement with the Nazi dictatorship’s projects of the autobahn and the German Alpine Road, where he rose to quick but limited influence for the entire Reich. Ultimately, Clarke’s designs were born and negotiated under the auspices of a democracy, while Seifert had no qualms about tying his career to a dictatorship.

Clarke and Seifert were the most prominent figures associated with scenic roads in their respective countries; the scenic infrastructures that they championed and planned became some of the most visible and widely known exemplars of roadmindedness. These roads were exclamation points on the landscapes they traversed. According to their designers and acolytes, drivers and passengers on such roads would be able to immerse themselves in
scenery, thus gaining a new appreciation of their surroundings. As picture-perfect as they appear, however, these scenic infrastructures often erased layers of human work on the land, especially that performed by persons of lower status. In some cases, remaking landscapes meant displacing locals and obliterating their dwellings.

Roadmindedness and its institutional carriers spanned the Atlantic and connected countries such as the United States and Germany. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, to realize that scenic roads in either country appeared in the garb of the vernacular. In terms of design, both Clarke and Seifert disdained the abstract modernism of the Bauhaus school and sought to counter it with regionalist, landscape-oriented patterns for road and roadside. For them, the degree to which their plans reflected and furthered ostensibly innate American or German values of landscape mattered greatly. Their public pronouncements speak of individual or national achievements, not international developments: their points of reference were mostly their home countries, where the purpose, design, extent, and use of landscaped roads were highly contested, to the point that road development became one with politics. In this sense, Clarke and Seifert were political actors. Both used the appeal of automobility for large-scale efforts to transform and redesign the landscapes of the United States and Germany. Together with millions of their compatriots, they embraced modernity in the form of the automobile but also sought to use its dynamism for reestablishing natural connections: in their eyes, ligaments of landscape—of forests, rivers, and open land—needed restitching in the form of roads, as did emotional tethers between twentieth-century dwellers and their environments.

At least initially, Clarke and Seifert trusted in and tried to establish the curative powers of the car-road complex. Early twenty-first-century observers might find such a stance to be odd at best, but these two architects and spokesmen for the landscaped road found themselves and their work in the mainstream of cultural attention, political power, and economic resource allocation. In doing so, they relied upon decades of political and cultural work by planners, automotive enthusiasts, tourism boosters, and writers who made the union of landscape and roads possible. Clarke and Seifert, in other words, both promoted and benefited from roadmindedness.

While historians of planning and architecture have examined the roads associated with these two individuals, it is worthwhile to assess their plans and the contexts in which they operated in a more comparative mode. Given
the extent of parkways in the United States during the interwar period and the attention paid to them internationally, America figured prominently. Designers sought to emancipate themselves from European examples and aimed to create suburban drives without adventures or major driving risks, but with copious scenic intake. This type of road had no counterpart in Germany during this period, either conceptually or on the ground. German planners, however, were intrigued by the aspiration to counter the unplanned railroad journey with a professionally designed landscape of scenic surplus. While Clarke and Seifert stand out as specimens, the comparative environmental history of roadways transcends their individual biographies. As the following pages will show, landscape architects were keen to assert themselves as design professionals during the first half of the twentieth century, with roads and especially parkways one of their most visible work sites.

Urban and suburban parkways in the vicinity of New York attracted considerable notice, both in the United States and in Europe, as they sought to provide a landscaped automotive immersion into scenery. Planning and building these landscapes, however, also involved displacing locals. Such social and environmental cleansing efforts were sometimes motivated by eugenicist thinking. Outside of the Northeast, other cities and regions spent resources on parkways and roadside improvement. German planners mostly observed rather than built such roads during this period, as the relative paucity of automobiles made new road construction economically questionable. Brushing aside such constraints, the Nazi dictatorship sponsored the planning and construction of the extensive autobahn network. While borrowing parkway rhetoric, these roads represented a jumble of propaganda, haphazard planning, and haste. In both Germany and the United States, design, scenery, and politics were deeply intermingled.

**Landscape Architecture and Roadmindedness**

Tellingly, both Clarke and Seifert performed the work of civil engineers during World War I, without having received formal training in this discipline. In the spring of 1918, Clarke designed bridges in the battlefields of France as a member of the Army Corps of Engineers, where he earned the lifelong nickname of “Major.” His units supported the Allied war effort by building heavy steel bridges over the River Somme, its tributaries, and the Somme Canal as part of the successful efforts to block a German offensive in March of that year. Some 185 miles to the east of Clarke, Seifert had planned
and supervised the building of a military light railroad in Lorraine several months before Clarke’s efforts bore fruit. Seifert adapted the tracks to landforms; the goal, however, was not aesthetic gain, but camouflage.2

For Seifert, blending nature and technology became a peacetime profession after the war. Born and raised in Munich, he had studied architecture at the technical university of his hometown. He took over his father’s small construction company upon returning from France. After it went bankrupt he found unsteady employment as a freelance architect and by teaching architecture classes at his alma mater. An avid gardener with an abiding interest in organic farming, he immersed himself and became part of the nascent field of landscape architecture. Several private backyards and gardens bore Seifert’s imprint. But it was not until 1933 that he began to apply his ideas to large infrastructural projects.3

For Gilmore Clarke, landscape architecture had already been a profession before his military service; public works, in particular parkways, became his métier when he returned. His parents owned a nursery in New York City and sent him to a private school that prepared him for his studies at Cornell, first in architecture, and then in landscape architecture.4 Clarke was part of the first generation of American-trained landscape architects. Rather than studying in Europe and visiting canonically designed landscapes, as most of the few garden and landscape architects in the United States had done before him, his training was entirely American.

Landscape architects on both sides of the Atlantic were keen to demonstrate the relevance of their new profession by participating in the technological transformations of landscapes in the twentieth century. Rather than arguing over whether new roads, power lines, or hydroelectric plants were necessary or desirable, their basic instinct was to search for aesthetically acceptable solutions to design challenges. This approach set them apart from conservationists and preservationists, whose critique of modernity was often more fundamental. To be sure, the lines between preservation, conservation, and landscape architecture were sometimes blurry: Frederick Law Olmsted’s well-known 1865 report recommending the creation of a park in Yosemite is but one example of a landscape architect acting in the capacity of a preservationist. In Europe, architects and landscape architects sometimes also argued for nature preserves. Seifert, for example, was a prominent member of conservationist organizations in his native Bavaria. Preservationist goals coalesced with professional politics: as parks in America and
Western Europe were built on the idea of access by visitors, they needed transportation corridors and amenities. Designing master plans, roads, hotels, and campgrounds became the province of architects and landscape architects; the infrastructure of conservation and tourism depended on professional design experts, as the discussion of the National Park Service in chapter one has shown. Growing numbers of landscape architects found employment with the Park Service and dominated the institution by the 1950s.5

**The Bronx River Parkway**

Among those experts, Clarke was foremost in the United States, at least when it came to roads. After his graduation from Cornell in 1913 and other jobs, he began to work for the Bronx Parkway Commission, which had been set up in 1906 but was languishing for lack of funds.6 The Commission’s twin goals were building a landscaped road and, in today’s parlance, ecologically restoring this river valley in the Bronx and Westchester County. The primary method to achieve these goals was building a road exclusively for automobiles in a landscape cleansed of weeds and undesirable residents. The road had entry and exit ramps and no intersections at grade level. In the eyes of middle-class professionals such as Clarke, the Bronx River Valley had deteriorated socially and ecologically. Recent immigrants, many of them Italian Americans, lived in unsightly shacks, blighting the surrounding landscape, according to these views. For the promoters of the project, building a transportation corridor in a rejuvenated environment was both a return to a more idyllic landscape past and an embrace of modernity in the form of the car-road complex. Clarke assisted the German-born Herman Merkel, a trained forester employed by the New York Zoo, who consulted on landscape matters for the road. After the war, planning and construction of the Bronx River Parkway accelerated and the road was opened in 1925. Although a mere fifteen miles (twenty-four kilometers) long, the parkway garnered publicity both in the United States and abroad.

Photographs of the Bronx River Parkway were one of the most effective ways to promote the road, both domestically and internationally. The commissioners and planners for the parkway sought to obliterate what they saw as an overly commercialized, polluted river valley inhabited by poor immigrants, and replace it with a picture of scenery and purity. In their eyes, the billboards put up for railroad passengers and the unkempt valley floor
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with garden plots needed expurgatorial professionals, not the gardening efforts by immigrants. The result was a remade river, newly planted trees and shrubs, and a placid park scenery. The railroad embankment can be seen on the extreme right of both pictures. Historian Timothy Davis calls these practices “deliberate and often deceptive.” Residents were never shown, only their dwellings, which did not live up to middle-class standards.\(^7\)

**Beyond the Bronx River Parkway**

With visibility from the Bronx River road, Clarke went on to design parkways on his own. Robert Moses’s patronage catapulted Clarke into an elevated position of nationwide public advocacy for parkways. He acted as a culturally versatile ambassador who could imbue these highways with cultural prominence in a rapidly changing country. He gained considerable

One of the sites for the Bronx River Parkway. With “before” images such as this one and the “after” photo on the facing page, the Bronx River Parkway Commission portrayed its planning and building efforts as salutary and scenic. The human costs of displacement were invisible in these photographs, which contributed to the outsize attention that this short road received in the United States and Europe. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Collection LC-J717-X98-52
prominence by codifying the design language for parkways, and by asserting their importance among architects, writers, and politicians. Clarke was a self-assured expert championing a culturally charged infrastructure for a new technology. The growing presence of automobiles in the 1920s made questions of roads and road design pressing policy and design issues, and Clarke made sure that his voice was heard and his plans implemented.

As diminutive as it was, the Bronx River Parkway was celebrated as the first automotive parkway in professional and popular publications inside and outside the United States. Dozens of publications praised its novelty and virtues. In terms of design, this was one of the first parkways outside a park and outside a city. The designers incorporated curvilinear alignment and, first and foremost, an emphasis on the experience of the ride. Grades were separated through bridges, underpasses, and on- and off-ramps, thus ensuring an uninterrupted drive. In addition, the planners controlled vistas for the drivers and land use for local residents: the parkway’s right-of-way was an astonishing 600 feet (183 meters) wide, on average. Billboards and houses were erased from the landscape; a more open, naturalistic design predominated.8
Aerial view of the Bronx River Parkway. Seen from above, the Bronx River Parkway's undulating design contrasts with the straight railroad. The wide right-of-way of the road includes the remade Bronx River Valley, whose inhabitants were relocated. Courtesy of the Westchester County Archives
The Westchester County parkway planners were not at all shy about tooting their own horns. In a report to the 1930 International Road Congress in Washington, DC, Jay Downer, a Princeton-trained civil engineer and chief engineer of the Westchester County Park Commission, highlighted grade separation through bridges and underpasses as one of the achievements of what he termed the “Westchester county type of traffic parkway.” At an average cost of $100,000, such bridges and underpasses were expensive items. In contrast to regular highways, the Bronx River Parkway prevented private landowners from accessing it other than by using entry ramps through legal and design means. “Reservational control” was the goal.\(^9\) Downer’s account contributed to the outsized reputation that this road acquired in the United States and Europe. Delegates at the Congress partook of the publication frenzy surrounding the Bronx road. Professional journals and general-audience newspapers praised the novelty of its design.

**Constructing a Landscape of Control**

Scenic driving and ecological restoration coalesced in this project.\(^10\) The third interwoven element was social control: some residents of the Bronx valley were forced to move out of what the planners called the “reservation.” Their houses were auctioned off and demolished. The dwellings of these poor, working-class Italian immigrants did not align with the envisioned scenic qualities of the drive. Once the parkway was completed, no buildings were allowed within three hundred feet of the road.\(^11\)

This type of roadmindedness rested on environmental and social control. The drive to the northern New York suburbs was naturalized to the extreme on this parkway, with plants and trees shielding suburban development from passengers and drivers. The designers extolled the ways in which both the natural and the social environment of the Bronx River Valley were restored through the planning and construction process: instead of weedy and unkempt waterscapes and occasional garden plots, a pleasing, unproductive, and complete landscape could be seen through the windshield. From a design perspective, the pictures presented aligned with the picturesque, English style of landscapes, in which undulating paths met the pleasant view of meadows and valleys.\(^12\) In an oral history from the 1960s, Clarke noted that some design parameters, especially for bridges, were adaptations of European models.\(^13\)

The constructed landscape—the total volume of earth to be moved was
two million cubic yards—was at once picturesque and decidedly modern. A cleaner river and valley provided the backdrop for drivers and passengers. Modernity also meant the control of scenery and social setting. One of the three commissioners for the Bronx River Parkway was Madison Grant, whose equally passionate advocacy for conservation and eugenics has made historians ponder a causal link between the two. Grant’s book *The Passing of the Great Race* lamented the decline of “Nordic” European stock and became a staple of voices seeking to restrain Southern and Eastern European immigration to the United States.

For conservationists such as Grant, advocacy for protecting landscapes went hand in hand with a desire to control population and reproduction, undergirded by clearly racist views. He advocated for preserving redwood trees in California, for immigration control nationwide, and for the Bronx River Parkway. In all these endeavors, he “pursued a vision of sanitized, managed landscape as the moral environment needed to combat the degradation of American culture,” according to one author. For Grant, redwoods in the West needed protection from the onslaught of modernity, as they represented a pure and primeval America. In the East, reworking a valley floor by moving undesirable residents, cleaning up a waterway, and building a parklike road purified the land with the help of modernity’s accoutrements: professional planners, pavement, cars on the move, and controlled vegetation. A return to an imagined prelapsarian natural state was the goal.

The apparent appeal of early parkways aligned with the exclusionary goals of some of their proponents in this interwar version of roadmindedness. The pleasure and beauty associated with a drive on the Bronx River Parkway depended on excluding untidy people and landscapes. Ordering, classifying, and remaking was at the heart of these ideas. As the historian Alexandra Minna Stern observes, the “apparition of eugenics sits restlessly at the heart of American environmentalism.” In the realm of American suburban parkways, displacing people and remaking landscapes merged in the name of beautified landscapes.

Three lasting legacies arose from the Bronx River Parkway: the emergence of a vocabulary of beauty and accessible nature, the professional coalition of civil engineers and landscape architects, and the realization that property values alongside the parkways increased. Therefore, local governments could justify the expenditures for these types of roads—higher property taxes would result. Between 1923 and 1933, New York’s Westchester
County spent over $80 million to complete a system of parks and parkways. Even more (in)famous is the work of Robert Moses (1888–1981), as the chairman of the Long Island State Park Commission and, from 1934, as Commissioner of Parks for New York. Gilmore Clarke was his chief landscape architect. Together with the Cornell-trained landscape architect Michael Rapuano, Clarke designed many of the Depression-era parkways associated with Moses. In 1937, Clarke and Rapuano established a consulting company for engineering and landscape architecture, which not only offered designs for parkways and expressways, but also community master plans, programs for urban renewal, and planning for college and university campuses.\(^{18}\)

Robert Moses in the Landscape of Transportation

Moses looms large over the history of transportation and mobility in the United States. Needless to say, he was roadmindedness incarnate. His outsized persona, political acumen, longevity, and advocacy of car-friendly cities and environments have since made him anathema to community-oriented planners and critics of automobility who see in him the epitome of high-handed, top-down decision-making. His most prominent biographer argues as much.\(^{19}\) One of the last vestiges of Progressivism, Moses changed the landscape not only of the city and state of New York, but also of planning and roadbuilding nationwide. His downfall in the 1960s was as spectacular as his rise during the first half of the century. Without ever holding elected office, Moses amassed and defended power for several decades. His loss of political loyalty with a new generation of politicians and the emergence of community activists such as Jane Jacobs contributed to his undoing. Playgrounds, beaches, bridges (including the massive Triborough Bridge project), and roads bore his imprint. Scenic infrastructures helped to establish his name nationally. Apart from his personality, the ways in which Moses marshaled expert knowledge and molded infrastructures embody a confident, mid-twentieth-century professionalism that brooked almost no opposition. More recently, some historians have painted a different picture of Moses by accentuating his “effectiveness within a system of constraints.”\(^{20}\) No stranger to controversy, especially in his later career, Moses remains a subject of disagreements.\(^{21}\) One anecdote in particular speaks to these qualities. A parkway on Long Island leading to Jones Beach, itself enhanced under Moses, features bridges with clearances so low as to block buses, which would have carried predominantly African American visitors without automobiles—
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segregation in concrete terms. Or so the story goes; Moses’s biography and an oft-cited academic paper have spread it widely. Some scholars disagree, noting oversimplification and even including a reproduction of a bus schedule in a learned paper. Regardless of its underreported complexities, the account and its durability are instructive. Given how polarizing Moses was, how he generated equal amounts of veneration and abhorrence, it is perhaps no wonder that the popular notion has survived for so long. It does, however, divert attention from the more important observation that the Moses parkways were built when most households in New York City did not own an automobile, thus creating exclusion on a much broader level than a set of bridges. Moses and his planners had no qualms about razing neighborhoods and displacing residents both for parkways and expressways in bouts of infrastructural racism.

Seen in this light, it is remarkable how the imperious and abrasive Moses helped to put road systems into place that made highbrow critics swoon over their beauty. Memorably, Moses himself characterized his approach to urban roadbuilding after 1945 by saying, “When you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat ax.” His interwar plans for suburban roads might perhaps evoke the image of him wielding a scalpel instead. His sharpest postwar critic, the architectural writer and public intellectual Lewis Mumford, gushed over the marine parks and the “great landscaped highways” leading to Long Island beaches in the 1930s. They left him “in a state of ecstatic admiration.” Mumford was impressed by the design and the careful selection of plants and shrubs. The Taconic State Parkway, a northern extension of the Bronx River Parkway in the Hudson Valley, lived up to the level of a “consummate piece of art” in Mumford’s eyes. Unperturbed by the regionalist architectural styles on parkways, the modernist architectural critic Sigfried Giedion professed being exhilarated by simultaneously “being connected with the soil yet . . . hovering just above it” when driving on such roads. Parkways embodied a specifically modern appreciation of space and time for this writer: “The space-time feeling of our period can seldom be felt so keenly as when driving, the wheel under one’s hand, up and down hills, beneath overpasses, up ramps, and over giant bridges.” The novelty of an uninterrupted ride on highways designed for cars and the scale of the roadscape equaled modernity itself for Giedion. Modernist architects, unsurprisingly, embraced cars. In one of the most remarkable examples, Frank Lloyd Wright presented a plan for a mountaintop facility for
a privately owned mountain outside of Washington, DC in the mid-1920s. The building was designed for automobiles, whose drivers would ascend on a broad ramp, enjoy views from the top, and then descend. Hotel rooms, a planetarium, restaurant, and other facilities would have completed this building. It was, however, never built.27

Proposals and voices such as these extolled the attention to detail and the designers’ efforts. Drivers who did not contemplate how the road was made—probably the vast majority of them—were more likely to experience a recreational ride in a natural setting. Whether or not the landscape was contrived mattered less to them than the possibility of traversing terrain pleasantly in a non-productive manner sanctioned and provided by the state. New York’s grandiose 1923 plan for a statewide system of parks connected by parkways promised just that: rather than merely a means to get to a state park, the ride to the park was to be a part of the experience. Scenery, whether mountainous or littoral, accompanied drivers and passengers from the moment they entered the park-parkway complex. Hundreds of miles of parkways thus appeared on the drawing boards and on the landscape of New York over the next decades. Not to be left behind, Connecticut added its own parkways.28

**Parkways beyond the Northeast**

The focus on Moses and on New York, however, obscures how broad and deep the governmentally supported movement for landscaped parkways was in the America of the 1920s and 1930s. Several states announced ambitious plans either to incorporate parkway design features into new highways and update their old ones or to build new parkway systems altogether. The highway commissioner for Minnesota announced the goal of creating a “distinctive parkway system covering the whole state” by creating funding incentives for the counties to build such roads, rather than (or in addition to) highways that would allow trucks.29 To this day, Minneapolis boasts one of the country’s longest continuous systems of public urban parkways. A loop road of fifty-two parkway miles (eighty-four kilometers) connecting various lakes and other parks called the Grand Rounds has encircled the city since the 1920s. Roads forming an arterial circle had been envisioned in the first plan for a park system, which the noted landscape architect Horace Cleveland conceived as a unity of parks and parkways in 1883, including some of the latter along the Mississippi River.30 Initial road stretches along
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lakes and rivers became the Grand Rounds in the half-decade leading up to 1925 under park superintendent Theodore Wirth; paving was not completed until federal relief money made it possible during the Great Depression.

The prominence of the Olmsted parkways at the beginning and the Robert Moses parkways at the apex of the American parkway movement has led some historians to overlook the landscaping of thousands of miles of ordinary highways in some American states. Roadmindedness was widespread. Before 1933, Texas and other states implemented ideas about fitting roads into their environments extensively, the significance and exposure of the Northeastern parkways notwithstanding. In addition to showing the extent to which parkway ideas circulated among and were implemented by American professionals nationwide, these developments show that highway “beautification,” as it was most often called, thrived on ideas labeled “European” and sometimes proposed by European actors. The other important facet was the involvement and eventual displacement of female middle-class amateurs.

Texas, the largest continental state, was also the most interesting one in this regard: by 1940, some 9,600 miles (15,450 kilometers) of highways in the Lone Star State had been planted with trees and shrubs; plantings for controlling erosion were added to almost 14,000 miles (22,500 kilometers) of highways there. The professionals in charge of the Texas Highway Department did not merely want to add beauty to their existing highways or design new ones in a pleasing manner. Rather, beautification and conservation—in particular, erosion control after rainfall—went hand in hand. The job of promoting these arboreal implements fell to a thirty-seven-year-old landscape architect who had previously designed the urban park system for the capital city of Austin. Jacobus “Jac” Gubbels (1896–1976), an immigrant from the Netherlands with Dutch and German training, had worked in the Dutch colony of Sumatra for six years as a “plantation locater” before coming to the United States. Roadmindedness traveled across borders via journals and conferences and sometimes with an individual such as him.

Gubbels, apparently, was a one-man show with considerable institutional backing. In the late 1920s, the state highway engineer had dismissed the practice of planting trees alongside highways as “European,” until a persistent member of the State Highway Commission convinced him of the value of saving existing trees and scattering wildflower seeds. In 1931, Texas was the third state to set up a Bureau of Roadside Development. Gubbels
took over this office and used it as a platform for propaganda. Lively articles in *Landscape Architecture* carried his design proposals to a professional audience of peers. Five years into his Texas tenure, a prominent publisher issued Gubbels’s book-length, accessibly written roadside treatise (*American Highways and Roadsides*), an exhortative manual highlighting the virtues of a new profession that Gubbels called the “landscape engineer.” What was such a person to do?

Quite accurately, Gubbels noted that civil engineers planning a road would detest beauty “that is plastered on” and that they scorned “arty” decorations. Rather, the landscape engineer only had a place in modern planning and construction if he (!) could make the road safer, less expensive, and more beautiful, all at once. Only then would this new profession become indispensable. Gubbels imagined four main tasks. First, to imagine the completed highway before construction, which depended upon understanding the engineering issues involved, and upon gaining the cooperation of civil engineers. Second, the landscape engineer was employed in creating the conditions for a safe and comfortable ride, which, third, was to occur in a beautiful way, as the landscape engineer would “clothe the completed highway in its most becoming garb.” Fourth, all of this would be achieved in a way that lowered construction and maintenance costs, mostly by preventing erosion.

All in all, his book was a plea for establishing landscape engineers throughout the United States rather than merely a presentation of achievements. Gubbels’s account demonstrates that finding a common language for engineers and architects was the key to injecting engineering debates over highways with the kind of attention for roadsides and landscapes that landscape architects envisioned. Written in blunt, unadorned prose, the treatise presented these issues as commonsensical and economically wise, rather than culturally loaded and infused with landscape references. The focus for Gubbels—at least in his public pronouncements for a wider audience—was clearly the road, not the landscape it was in. This differentiated his approach from the writings and practices of the Northeastern landscape architects who were most happy when they could achieve parity, if not dominance over the design process, rather than seek cooperation with engineers from a subordinate position. The extensive legal and professional framework for parkways in the vicinity of New York was not the norm.

Despite these differences, all professional actors concerned with the road-
Speed and roadside perception. One of the few observers to adopt the driver’s perspective in publications, the landscape planner Jac Gubbels juxtaposes the “driver’s eye” at 30 and 70 miles per hour. At faster speeds, the driver’s range of vision is more limited, roadsides are less visible, and the road appears to be narrow. Gubbels worked for the Texas Highway Commission and made a name for himself nationwide with practical design advice. Jac L. Gubbels, *American Highways and Roadsides* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938), 22
side were aided by and ultimately dismissive of the work of local women’s garden clubs. In the 1920s and early 1930s, middle-class women in these clubs prominently and successfully argued for the conservation of roadside trees and the banning of billboards, with the goal of making all of Texas “one vast park.” State highway engineers and landscape architects noted and at times amplified these female voices, as they lent prominence and middle-class respectability to their agenda. When the time came, however, to voice concerns over roadside issues within a professional structure, with offices, jobs, and regulative power, state officials predictably deemed this issue to be a “man’s job.”

Gubbels was one of the few writers among landscape architects to pay attention to the sightlines of motorists traveling at higher speeds. His book considered landscape as viewed through a windshield. Compared to other authors on roadside improvement in the pages of *Landscape Architecture* during these years, Gubbels is one of the most lively and eloquent. But he was not an outlier. The Bureau of Public Roads employed Wilbur H. Simonson (1897–1989), a prolific planner and writer, from 1929 until 1965. He became chief of the Bureau’s “Roadside Branch” from 1932 until his retirement. By the 1940s, it had become common practice for state highway departments to hire landscape architects. Again, this did not mean they had decisive influence on planning. In the pages of their professional journal, landscape architects often assumed a defensive posture by asserting that they were not “pansy-planters”; thus, they asked to be involved before and during the highway planning phase, not afterward.

Simonson’s showpiece was the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, the other parkway to spread the gospel of roadmindedness widely, both within the United States and abroad. Built to commemorate the two hundredth birthday of America’s first president in 1932, the federal government sponsored the construction of this road leading from the nation’s capital to George Washington’s plantation. On its approach from the city, motorists experienced the closing and opening-up views of the Potomac River. Remarkably, the otherwise utilitarian Bureau of Public Roads employed the same landscape architects who had worked in Westchester County for this special occasion. This road marked the entry of the Bureau into the realm of parkways. Bureau chief Thomas MacDonald sought “as close an approach to nature as can be managed.” In contrast to the restoration goals of the Bronx River
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Parkway, the Mount Vernon road treated the Potomac river as mere scenery, not an environment to be rebuilt. In fact, the highway plans conflicted with efforts to turn both banks of the river from Mount Vernon to Great Falls into a preservation area. The road builders’ techno-natural argument prevailed.40

American parkways defined landscapes for urban motorists and made them the vital ingredient of the simultaneously individualistic and prepackaged scenic driving experience. Bringing nature closer to city dwellers was celebrated as a democratic achievement and thus a token of Americanness. In a historically rare coalition of professional groups, landscape architects and civil engineers presented parkways as a progressive means to egalitarian consumerism that would mend the rupture between country and city. The Mount Vernon Memorial Highway was to be as patriotic as the Washington Monument and as modern as the newest earthbound mode of circulation and mobility. While urban and suburban parkways in other locations did not achieve the fame of the Mount Vernon road, they brought this vision of blending nature and technology to millions of Americans.

The Allure of Fordism

The Bronx River Parkway and the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway were only two of the suburban parkways constructed during the interwar period. Yet, seen from the vantage point of the international circulation of knowledge and their contribution to roadmindedness, they stand out. For the first half of the twentieth century, Americans owned more automobiles than the rest of the world combined. This made cars and roads in the United States an attractive object of study from abroad. Manufacturers, planners, and government officials were more than happy to receive this growing attention. During the interwar period, “the Germans made a second discovery” of the America of Edison and Ford, writes historian Thomas P. Hughes.41 Touring the massive River Rouge Ford factory in Michigan became obligatory for engineering and other experts visiting the United States. Fascination with the output of this plant and astonishment over the extent of consumerism were some of the characteristics that garnered their interest. The prominence of automobiles was not lost on any German observer. Experts in civil engineering and landscape architecture immersed themselves in the study of American parkways.

The fact that relatively few Germans owned automobiles, especially in
comparison to the United States, made such visits to and reports from the land of mass motorization more appealing, not less so. Promoters of cars and roads were eager to link technological modernity with the rise of the automotive sector, and to posit America as a vision of what was to come in Germany. Together with aviation, automobility possessed a futuristic cachet, which contributed to roadmindedness.

During the interwar period, a German lobby presented a vision of long-distance roads. Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Basel were to be connected with the acronymic Hafraba Road. The inspiration came from Italy, where the autostrada had received Mussolini’s support. Close to three hundred miles (five hundred kilometers) of toll roads for cars and trucks were built by the mid-1930s. The Fascist regime fancied the infrastructural prowess of new roads, but it paid considerably less attention to landscaping than either German or American planners. North of the Alps, efforts to construct a national highway network went nowhere during the years of the Weimar Republic. Undeterred, landscape architects published papers and plans on how to design the roads of the future together with their surroundings. Many referenced American parkways as examples of scenic highways. The idea of parkways as automotive corridors in parks, however, appeared alien to them. Urban public parks tended to be much smaller if they were recent, and cars would have taken up spaces for pedestrians. Older parks, often the remnants of feudal hunting or pleasure grounds, tended to be larger, but bourgeois aesthetic tastes for walks favored a retreat from hectic modern life, of which automobiles were only the most recent symbol.

Before the Nazi takeover, German states and provinces spent some money to adapt existing roads for automotive traffic by widening and paving them. New construction, especially on a large scale, was a subject of learned debates, based on the expectation that car ownership would expand in the future, rather than on an assessment of reality on the ground. Engineers expanded their knowledge during this decade by researching different types of base layering and surfacing. They standardized and published extensively. As far as car-only roads were concerned, a stand-alone twelve-mile (twenty-kilometer) stretch of highway between Cologne and Bonn opened in 1932, but it remained an anomaly. Automobiles were sparse, especially outside of affluent urban areas, and the railroad network was extensive and successful, both for freight and passenger transport. While mass consumerism was on the rise in Germany, cars were far from being affordable consumer items.
Pointedly, the economist Werner Sombart dismissed car-only highways as “roads for the cheerful enjoyment of life by the rich.” The state-owned railroad ruled transportation. In fact, it provided steady income for the Berlin government. Supporting the competitor of rail transport made little political sense, therefore. This was the opposite of the situation in the United States. American privately owned railroads had been involved in corruption, were accused of trying to monopolize traffic, and farmers were eager to compete with what they saw as corporate behemoths by using their own vehicles on farm-to-market roads.

**Autobahns and the Nazi Dictatorship**

The most prominent Continental European expression of roadmindedness, the Nazi autobahn network, was supposed to represent the Nazi regime’s dictatorial embrace of power. In contrast to the virtual absence of road construction during the Weimar Republic, and despite the lack of automobiles on these roads, the regime pushed for the planning and construction of a 2,500-mile (4,000-kilometer) network. Seifert and other landscape architects who were not defined as Jewish embraced the infrastructural frenzy of the early Nazi years as a professional boon.

Quite literally, the autobahn had Hitler’s name written all over it. While it would be inaccurate to adopt the propaganda claim that the autobahn was “Adolf Hitler’s roads,” it would be equally misleading to discount the dictator’s impetus and influence. He embraced the highway network as a propaganda tool and as a token of Nazi modernity. Germany’s jump-start into individual motorization in the 1930s, although haphazard, was economically, politically, and culturally significant. Economically, the dictatorship aimed to transform the transportation sector by adding a layer of cars and roads to the country’s extensive (and dominant) public transportation system; politically, the push toward motorization served the goal of portraying the fledgling regime as activist and goal-oriented; and culturally, the car-road complex was imbued with an aura of novelty and modernity. As one celebratory newspaper put it, Hitler had done away with the “medieval opposition to the automobile.”

In the spring of 1933, political enemies of the regime were rounded up and sent to recently established concentration camps; Germans defined as Jewish were legally excluded from holding positions in public administration, including universities; and Hitler gave a speech envisioning Germany
as a country crisscrossed by four-lane highways populated by a racially pure populace riding in their own automobiles.48 This was a regime that prized constant activism and frenzied efforts at mobilization in every respect. Thus, putting more people (or men, to be more accurate) behind steering wheels on new roads was central to the regime’s efforts and self-portrayal. Moving troops and military equipment were not the main goals for investing in these roads; in fact, German generals opposed them in closed meetings. Automotive leisure was to be the result of these efforts: “Weekend, Kraft durch Freude [the regime’s leisure agency], Volkswagen—all three serve the great Nordic inclination to overcome the tightness of territory at least for recreation,” as the highway official Fritz Todt averred.49

Cars and roads were part of a Nazi effort for a racially defined consumer society. Inspired by Fordist mass production, and the writings of Henry Ford himself, Hitler embraced these conveyances as harbingers of modernity. Ford’s antisemitism also did not hurt, to be sure. The German terms for the celebrated cars and roads mattered: as Volkswagen, people’s cars, the automobiles were to be popular and affordable, bringing car ownership to the masses; and the Reichsautobahnen signaled the central state’s deep involvement in roads. Usually, cars were driven locally, on weekend outings, or for road trips on shared roads. The new highways, however, were meant exclusively for cars and trucks, to be driven at constantly high speeds, without having to worry about intersections, oncoming traffic, pedestrians, bicyclists, or any other mode of transportation.

With these efforts, the Nazis embraced a distinct form of consumerism, using cars and roads to glorify the state and its powerful leader. At the same time, consumerism was individual. Volkswagens were supposed to be affordable with a savings plan. Historians have been debating whether the latter effort was a genuine foray into consumerism or merely the attractive facade behind which the regime hid its more reprehensible policies of categorization, exclusion, and extermination. It is clear, though, that the specific Nazi mode of consumerism was intended only for citizens defined as Aryan. The automobiles of many middle-class Germans classified as Jews became the loot of Nazi thugs early on. In 1938, the regime limited their mobility and stripped them of driver’s licenses.50 Defiantly, the Dresden professor Victor Klemperer held on to his car as long as he could and used it to temporarily escape the increasing pressures of being defined as Jewish. His diary entries speak to these escapist moments.51
In contrast to the bombastic propaganda, the motorization effort in the form of the Volkswagen failed dismally during the Nazi years. For German car manufacturers, an affordable car for the masses made little business sense, given their profit margins on large vehicles for affluent consumers and the lower purchasing power of the working class. In response, the dictatorship set up a state-run company built from scratch. A savings plan, popular among racially selected consumers, created expectations for a German version of the Model T. But the production facility, built in Northern Germany and modeled after the River Rouge facility in Michigan, mostly produced vehicles for the Reich’s war effort. Incongruously, some 2,400 miles (3,800 kilometers) of autobahn were built in Germany and Austria before the beginning of World War II shifted priorities for the Nazi regime. The autobahns were meant to impress not only with their scale—no country at
the time could boast such a network—but also with their quick construction. With only slight exaggeration, a propaganda movie claimed that three kilometers of roads were built per day during the peak of the construction frenzy. The net result was that the speed of constructing the autobahn outpaced the growth of the car sector by far.

The promise of a popular car and the effort put into planning and building the autobahn network were magnified by Nazi propaganda. The scale of the highway project and its rapid construction were celebrated over and over again. The regime unleashed a torrent of books, magazines, movies, newsreels, theater plays, and board games to tout its version of roadmindedness. Every kind and level of media was involved. Portrayals of movement and circulation were staples of Nazi parlance. The propaganda exaggerated the modest effects of road construction on unemployment relief. It claimed that the autobahn network would not only provide transportation benefits and stimulate the economy, but also enhance, rather than despoil, the landscape. The dictatorship commissioned painters and photographers to convey this notion pictorially.

Consumers of this multimedia onslaught would not have been able to ascertain the international underpinnings of such claims. Building a scenic highway rather than merely a utilitarian one was a specifically German and Nazi achievement, according to the regime’s top engineer, Fritz Todt (1891–1942). He supervised the autobahn project from 1933 onward and affirmed at one of the widely broadcast Nuremberg party rallies that “the National Socialist road builder prizes the cultural and landscape value of his new roads at least as highly as the purpose of material transportation. The National Socialist loves his homeland not only through word and song, but through deeds.” In Todt’s and the regime’s public pronouncements, the roads were German through and through. Yet, when Todt commissioned Seifert to offer his first landscaping advice for the autobahn, the engineer introduced the notion of a “Parkstraße,” obviously referring to American parkways.

Landscape architects and civil engineers paid close attention to the development of parkways in the United States; yet in public they stressed that only Germany was capable of presenting its landscapes in such a modern, motorized version. The hypernationalistic Nazi regime claimed that its road network was homegrown, but the expertise used in planning and building these roads was international. Todt himself was a keen observer of the American roadbuilding scene. He worked for a construction company in Munich
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during the interwar period, planned local and regional roads, and followed developments abroad, including those of the United States—as any alert civil engineer of his generation would. At the same time, Todt was an early and enthusiastic member of the Nazi party. During the dictatorship, Hitler entrusted Todt with the autobahn project, infrastructure planning, and industrial war production.

Given the rapid pace of autobahn planning and construction, and a paucity of civil engineers elsewhere, Todt recruited those from the country’s railroad and put them to work on its roads. The professional training and experience of these engineers would thus guide them to design roads along the lines of railroads: as straight and unadorned as possible. Such ideas flew in the face of wanting to build “Parkstraßen,” or parkway-like roads. When Seifert offered his services to Todt, the latter appointed him as an advisor and asked him to select a cadre of landscape architects to consult with the engineers. They were to act as counterweights to the railroad engineers. Seifert, whose freelance work had dried up during the Great Depression, cheerfully obliged.

The results of these efforts were rather mixed, however. Unlike in the United States, trucks shared the road with cars. More importantly, landscape architects and civil engineers clashed rather than cooperated; the scenic qualities of the autobahn were hotly contested and only sporadically realized. The first stretches of the autobahn resembled railroads and made for monotonous driving. This wouldn’t stop the propaganda from claiming that they were fully immersed in the landscape. Later extensions did direct drivers to vantage points, especially in proximity to the Central German Uplands and the northern rim of the Alps. The goal, according to Todt, was to give the highways a “scenic character immanent in German essence.”

While the propaganda would not tire of touting these assumed qualities, the planning and construction mirrored the muddled and contradictory political character immanent in Nazi governance. Established institutions and actors would be set to compete with new forces and ideas. These battles were overshadowed by bombastic claims and inconsistent execution.

This German version of roadmindedness caught the attention of foreign observers. A Pennsylvania newspaper, while impressed with the scope of the project, noted that a “small army of landscape architects” was working on the “horticultural decoration of the speedway”—a job description the architects would have abhorred, since they aimed to deeply embed the road in the
land, not merely add floral icing. At any rate, the American paper realized that the goal was to “give the maximum of beauty plus utility, but some sections have been laid out with no other object than to provide the traveler with aesthetic satisfaction. Chief of these is the Alpine Highway.” Gilmore Clarke provided a less flattering assessment of the autobahn, deeming it of lower aesthetic quality than American parkways.

For Seifert, the autobahn project and the Alpine Highway replaced the professional uncertainty of the Weimar Republic. Garden architects had mostly relied on commissions by private homeowners. Large public parks were rarely planned at the time, and infrastructural projects languished during the Weimar period. Due to the relative paucity of automobiles in Germany, calls for building new roads on a large scale were the province of technological enthusiasts and utopians. Seifert had not been one of them, but
he benefited from the torrent of infrastructural activism unleashed by the Nazi regime after 1933. “Scaling up” could have been his motto for the dictatorial years, as he made the transition from designing private backyards to planning a nationwide highway network; as his profession increasingly substituted entire landscapes for private gardens, his political acumen, unfettered by scruples, catapulted him from the position of a provincial architect to the job of advising an expansive dictatorship.

**Designs and Politics**

Design professionals such as Clarke and Seifert helped to give meaning to automobility in the interwar period. Both pursued remarkably similar visions of roadmindedness in drastically different political regimes. Clarke relied on the patronage of Robert Moses in New York and its environs and used this position to become the leading advocate for parkways in the United States. But it is also important to remember that parkways and landscaping highways thrived elsewhere, too, as the examples of Minneapolis and Texas show. By contrast, German landscape architects such as Seifert observed the American plans and highways. Roadbuilding on the scale of the United States was inconceivable in interwar Germany, low as the number of automobiles was. But parkways offered a glimpse of how landscape architects could broaden their professional portfolios and become involved in infrastructural work on a larger scale. The Nazi dictatorship, with its sudden and emphatic embrace of cars and roads, provided just that. Seifert’s patron was Todt, whose visions of German roads were inspired by American highways and parkways.

Driving or being driven served goals of national politics and would compensate for environmental losses. As we will see, Seifert’s ideas of nationhood were more exclusionist than Clarke’s vision of an ordered movement guided by professionals whose status was uncontested. However, they were united by the idea that automobility could cure some of the ills of modernity, if it was guided by experts such as them. These scenic infrastructures could be molded and remodeled. Parkway designers were not aiming to reestablish a pre-modern, pre-automobile, or even pre-railroad landscape. Rather, they wanted to make sure that the newest terrestrial transportation technologies of the day, cars and roads, would be controlled by professionals sensitive to the repercussions of the rise of automobility. While the protoco- ecological restoration of the Bronx River and its valley in the vicinity of the
June 1938 cover of *Fortune* magazine by Hans Barschel. This issue featured a ten-page article on Robert Moses and his infrastructural activities. The magazine’s cover shows an abstracted tangle of roads superimposed on a forest with bridges, interchanges, a tunnel, and roads reaching ever further, seen from a bird’s-eye view. The new scale and scope of roadways was meant to impress in and of itself, without a single automobile on these roads. They appear sculpted and dynamic. The graphic designer for the cover was Hans Barschel, who, just a few years earlier, had designed the poster for a large 1936 automobile exhibit in his native Germany. After emigrating to New York in 1937, Barschel began to work for American customers. *Fortune* © 1938 Fortune Media IP Limited. All rights reserved. Used under license. Fortune and Fortune Media IP Limited are not affiliated with, and do not endorse products or services of, University of Maryland.
Bronx River Parkway might seem like an effort to return the area to its pre-nineteenth-century condition, it would be more accurate to understand its result as an expertly managed modern landscape that sought to integrate a contemporary roadway for unencumbered, aesthetically pleasing movement of motorists, and a rejuvenation of a heavily used landscape. Neither man nor nature was paramount in such an environment—the effortlessly moving automobile was.

In terms of architectural styles, the regionalist architecture of the parkways put them somewhat at odds with modernists. Bauhaus architecture and the Modernist movement in general were anathema to both Seifert and Clarke; the former was glad to see the Bauhaus leave Nazi Germany, while the latter was incensed by its prominent role in exile at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Having served on the National Commission of Fine Arts from the 1930s to the 1950s, Clarke detested but could not prevent modernist architecture on the National Mall in Washington. He was particularly indignant at the building of the Hirshhorn Museum, a concrete cylinder on legs, designed by the modernist architect Gordon Bunshaft, which opened in 1974, and the East Building addition to the National Gallery of Art, which opened in 1978. While the former was “totally out of character” with the rest of the Mall, according to the grumbling octogenarian Clarke, the latter was “even more hideous” and, to boot, designed by “a Jap named I. M. Pei.”61 It would be pedantic to point out that Pei was, in fact, Chinese American; what really matters is that for Clarke, architectural modernism and Pei were equally foreign to one of the nation’s politically most significant public spaces.

Scenic infrastructures were contested spaces in the twentieth century. Roads and their landscapes were never mere transportation corridors. The ideology of roadmindedness had helped to elevate roads to levels of cultural, social, and political significance that they had rarely enjoyed before. They had become desirable elements of modernity, yet their relationship with architectural modernism was fraught. The emphasis on roadsides and landscapes opened up the realm of environmental remediation through mobility.

Roadmindedness was based on international exchanges, visits, and publications. By the 1920s, the United States saw itself as the lodestar of the automotive universe, what with its millions of mass-produced vehicles and thousands of miles of new roads. Among the latter, parkways took on a special meaning for Americans and for visitors, as these highways aimed to pro-
vide more than just movement. For a country such as Germany, with its relative scarcity of automobiles and no new roads to speak of, they became a reference point. Some of their design features entered the lexicon of autobahn planners, even though the results were inconclusive.

Both American parkways and the German autobahn were landscapes of exclusion, although at different levels and to different degrees. More so than other such roads, the Bronx River Parkway erased immigrants and their houses from the landscape to create a pastoral view seen from the scenic infrastructure. Not just on the autobahn but on every road, Germans defined as Jewish were legally banned from driving by 1938, thus ruling out this form of movement for them.

Even though they were predicated on the cross-border, intense exchange of knowledge, scenic infrastructures became increasingly inward looking. Parkway planners, especially Clarke’s group, emphasized the novelty and originality of their approaches. Germany’s Nazi dictatorship unsurprisingly disavowed any foreign parentage for its nationally charged projects. But the parallel histories continued. By the 1930s, the governments of these two countries were to sponsor even more ambitious efforts to reunite motorists with their landscapes.