



World's Fair, 1940. Theme Center and Statue of George Washington viewed from Court of Peace.

## Sights and Sounds of the Times

As the shuffling feet of breadlines and the staccato goosesteps of war filled the newsreels, America's artists filled the decade with sights and sounds of the human spirit.

Broadway plays, like Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, bestselling novels, like John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, and poems, like those of Pulitzer-prize winner Robert Frost, led people to reflect. While radio shows, like *Fibber McGee & Molly* and *Jack Benny*, reminded them to laugh.

America's 1930s soundtrack vibrated to the up and down beats of the times with sunny melodies and tearful refrains. While Judy Garland was sending notes somewhere over the rainbow, Billie Holiday was singing the blues. "Brother, can you spare a time," may have been the '30s signature lyric, but Benny Goodman showed folks how to swing. Behind the scenes, John Lomax, with new machine age recording equipment, brought the music of Appalachian hollows and the Mississippi Delta to new ears, introducing sounds that would change popular music for decades to come.

The 1939-1940 World's Fair in New York promised brighter days ahead, by showcasing the magic of machine age technologies in futuristic buildings. By the late 1930s, streamlined trains and airplanes, labor-saving washing machines, automatic record-changing jukeboxes, Technicolor movies, television, and other mechanical wizardry had begun to change Americans' daily lives.

But other events clouded the sunny message of the 1939-1940 World's Fair. Exhibit buildings for 61 nations made up its international pavilion. When the Fair began, as one observer recalls, the pavilion lit up the night sky. Then, in response to each new conquest by Hitler's armies, the lights went out in one building after another. Poland, conquered, Denmark, conquered, the black outs continued; the nights grew darker.