McCarthyism and the Atomic Age

Section 40.2

Communist sympathizer
A communist sympathizer is a person who believed in communist ideology but did not join the Communist Party. During the Depression, some Americans felt that communism might make the extremes of wealth and poverty fade away. When the fear of communist subversion heated up during the Cold War, these people were often accused of being disloyal.

House Un-American Activities Committee
HUAC investigated the film industry and other groups during the Cold War, looking for communists and communist sympathizers. HUAC affected American life by influencing Hollywood. Studios blacklisted people suspected of being communists and produced a series of anticommunist movies. HUAC’s affect on American life changed in 1957 when the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution does not give Congress unlimited power to investigate citizens’ private lives.

Alger Hiss case
Alger Hiss was a State Department official and advisor to President Roosevelt who was accused of being a communist spy. Ultimately, Hiss was convicted of perjury. The Alger Hiss case affected American life by confirming the suspicion that Soviet spies were working in the United States.

Rosenberg trial
Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were charged with passing atomic secrets to the USSR. After a trial, both were executed. The Rosenberg trial affected American life by confirming the suspicion that Soviet spies were working in the United States. It also caused some to question whether the search for communist sympathizers was going too far, as some people protested the severity of the sentence.

McCarthyism
McCarthyism has come to mean the practice of publicly accusing someone of subversive activities without sufficient evidence. The term came from the actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the early 1950s. McCarthyism affected American life by creating a climate of fear. People were fearful not just of communism, but also of being labeled subversive.
McCarthyism and the Atomic Age

Section 40.3

Atomic Age
The Atomic Age was a period when Americans had a high level of anxiety about the potential of an atomic bomb attack, yet they also saw the bomb as a symbol of power and innovation. The Atomic Age affected American life by encouraging thoughts about the peaceful use of the atom, such as atomic cars and power plants. The Atomic Age affected American life through its symbolism. The bomb inspired everything from drinks to songs to swimsuits.

Federal Civil Defense Administration
The FCDA was established in 1950 to help people prepare for a nuclear attack. The FCDA affected American life as civil defense preparedness became part of everyday life with community sirens, bomb shelters, and block wardens. The FCDA affected children’s lives as Bert the Turtle taught students to duck and cover in the event of a nuclear attack. For all the FCDA did to prepare Americans for a nuclear attack, Operation Alert showed that no amount of preparation would be enough.