



BRANCHE	SECTIONS	ÉPREUVE ÉCRITE
Anglais	B, C, D, E, F, G	<i>Durée de l'épreuve : 2 h 30</i> <i>Date de l'épreuve : 23 septembre 2019</i>

We're staying silent out of fear

Most ordinary people found it unbearable to live under communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The reasons varied: shortages of consumer goods, endless propaganda, restrictions on travel. Nothing was more psychologically exhausting than the constant pressure to watch every word one said, and to pretend to believe things one did not, for fear of negative repercussions. Dissidents called this “double consciousness.” It drove people crazy. Of all aspects of totalitarian life, citizens of the former Eastern Bloc say, this is the hardest to explain to those who grew up in the democratic West.

Until now, perhaps. A new study of political attitudes in the United States offers stunning evidence that most Americans censor themselves, except among people they regard as like-minded, on a large number of sensitive topics: immigration and immigrants; race and racism; gay, lesbian and gender issues; and Islam and Muslims.

It found that between 51 and 66 percent of Americans agree there is “pressure to think a certain way” about each of these topics. 68 percent report that “it is acceptable for me to express what I think” about race, or Islam, only among “people who are like me.” On immigration, 73 percent feel that way; on gay, lesbian and gender issues, the figure is 70 percent.

Political freedom has never been absolute in the United States, to be sure. For much of our history, ostracism or worse awaited advocates of racial equality, especially in the South. If anyone understands the oppressiveness of being forced to present a false front every day, it would be the American gay men and lesbians who grew up in the era of the closet.

Conversely, a certain measure of self-censorship is necessary to democracy; if people stop spreading bigotry, for example, it promotes trust and rational discourse. For all that, the report confronts us with a disturbing reality. We are a long way from the “double consciousness” of Eastern Europe, but we are, apparently, living among many millions of citizens who routinely lie about or hide their political opinions out of fear.

And what do they fear? Not necessarily government repression, the report suggests, but ridicule and harassment from their fellow citizens, which is often magnified by social media and can sometimes lead to trouble at school or work.

At least 80 percent of the public see both hate speech and political correctness as problems plaguing American politics. Donald Trump’s challenging of political correctness fuelled his electoral rise. Outrage at hate speech fuels the anti-Trump resistance.

Under communism, members of the party had to watch their words and actions as much or more than other citizens did. In the United States today, right- and left-wing tribes enforce “core beliefs” within their own ranks. With these less-than-tolerant ideological factions dominating everything from town hall meetings to Twitter, the far larger percentage of Americans who do see nuances, and who do favour compromise, keep their heads down.

They now constitute what the report describes as an Exhausted Majority, consisting of about two-thirds of the electorate. 65 percent of the Exhausted Majority feel that the politicians they support should be willing to listen to others and compromise. Yet their views are not reflected in political discourse, they believe. →

For the time being, the president of the United States is openly sowing fear and anger for political gain, and his Democratic Party opponents seem increasingly tempted to do the same. Hope for more decent and, indeed, freer politics lies in the possibility that members of the Exhausted Majority will wake up and raise their voices.

(592 words)

adapted from an article by Charles Lane, The Washington Post, October 2018

Glossary:

advocates: people who publicly support or recommend a particular cause or policy

bigotry: a highly prejudiced attitude, combined with a refusal to consider other people's opinions

conversely: on the other hand

ostracism: exclusion of an individual by the members of a group, who refuse to talk to him/her, for ex.

the era of the closet: the time in history before homosexual people could openly admit their sexual orientation, mainly because homosexuality was punishable by law

I) Working with the text (30 marks)

A) Comprehension (20 marks)

Use your own words as far as possible to answer the comprehension questions.

Make sure your answers do not overlap.

1. What parallels does Charles Lane draw between today's America and Eastern Europe under Communism? (8m)
2. Who does the author describe as the Exhausted Majority and why do they keep silent? (8m)
3. In what ways has Donald Trump's appearance on the political stage provoked divide and outrage? (4m)

B) Personal opinion (10 marks)

Write a structured personal opinion using between 100-150 words on the question below.

Indicate the word count.

“Speech is silver, silence is gold.” Do you believe there should be limits to the right to free speech?

II) Essay (30 marks)

Write an essay (between 300 and 400 words) on ONE of the following topics.

Indicate your choice clearly and include the word count.

1. For many generations, parents have expected their children to have a better life than themselves, but this may no longer be true. Discuss.
2. With the birth of the first gene-edited babies in November 2018, a door to a new world has been opened. In your opinion, is this development to be welcomed or condemned?
3. This year's 4th January was named 'Fat Cat Friday' by some journalists, exposing the fact that on that day top UK company bosses had already made what an average worker earns in a year. How can we tackle the problem of social inequality?