



Abdelkader Education Project

"Connecting...
continents, cultures, centuries"

January 2012

2011 in Review

Background: History does repeat itself. The Abdelkader Education Project (AEP), stimulated by the publication of *Commander of the Faithful* in 2008, is taking the baton from Col. Charles Henry Churchill who first recognized the importance of capturing the greatness of the emir's life and personality. Churchill's biography *La Vie d'Abd el Kader*, published in 1869, was intended to rescue Abdelkader's life story from becoming "alms to oblivion."

Examples of figures like Emir Abdelkader will help us meet the challenges of living in a multicultural world.

More information can be found at www.abdelkaderproject.org.

Year Three: The Mustard Seed Grows...Iowa and Beyond

Iowa Center for the Book supports Abdelkader Essay Contest to help increase Iowans' understanding of the Middle East and Muslims through reading. "We have a long-term commitment to encouraging Iowa students to read reflectively through our *Letters about Literature* reading/writing program," noted Coordinator Robin Martin. "Introducing the Abdelkader Essay Contest and John Kiser's book *Commander of the Faithful* to a wider student audience fits nicely with our mission."

2011-12 Abdelkader Essay Contest for Iowa high schools...Principal Financial Group and individual donors support the essay contest again for juniors and seniors with focus on culture, civility and leadership. Students from 22 schools across Iowa have entered the competition.

"Reading Commander of the Faithful and writing the essay for the Abdelkader Essay Contest provided a unique opportunity for students in my AP Human Geography class to connect multiple continents, centuries, and cultures with course curriculum as well as a relevant local connection to the origin of a town's name in Iowa." **Mark Rhodes, Social Studies Teacher, Decorah High School**

NEW 2011-12 Abdelkader Essay Contest for college students in Iowa...Luther College, University of Northern Iowa, University of Iowa and Wartburg College all have students participating.

3rd Annual AEP Forum "Transcending Boundaries...Pursuing Knowledge and Virtue" was held at Elkader Opera House on May 14th. Afternoon discussions led to an evening celebration to honor Emir Abdelkader and students touched by his life story. The Forum featured guest speakers from around the nation and entertainment.

Iowa 2010-11 Abdelkader Essay Contest with Principal Financial Group support. In Their Own Words: Excerpts from Winning Essays...

1st Place - Cole Crawford, Dubuque - "Assalamu 'Alaikum (Peace be Upon You)"

"Even though he lost battles – indeed, even lost the war for freedom from French occupation – Abd el-Kader won a greater and more timeless war. He fought a struggle to capture the world's hearts and minds, and emerged decisively victorious."

2nd Place - Madi Johansen, Decorah - "Abd el-Kader: True Jihad"

"The Emir's actions throughout his life showed the true religion of Islam; following the dictates of his faith made him a hero... Abdelkader's life embodied the words of the Qur'an 5:7, "Let not your hatred of other men turn you away from Justice. Be just...that is closer to piety."

3rd Place - Ben Bernatz, Decorah - "From Algeria to Iowa"

"I began to view his application of Islamic law in Algeria as a vehicle for establishing order and justice in his country. Abd el-Kader's tolerance, understanding, patience, wisdom, and dedication to living a godly life are all attributes that I can emulate in my own life."

Elkader - Bob Spielbauer - "Abd el-Kader: A Gift from the Desert"

"Abd el-Kader had the character of a leader and the morals of a saint. The strong moral guidance of his parents... taught him to be culturally tolerant very early in life. His character, especially strong humanitarian morals, has had the most effect on my life. Reading about his life has helped me come to see his people in a whole new light."

Elkader - Joe McGreal - "Abd el-Kader and Me"

"I realized that Muslims and Christians aren't so different. The foremost similarity between the two is that they both emphasize carrying out the will of God...which requires trust."

Washington DC Trip Awarded by Algerian Embassy for Elkader Abdelkader Essay Contest students Joe McGreal and Bob Spielbauer.

Abdelkader Essay to Iowa State Fair when 4-H member Bob Spielbauer received honors in Personal Development for his essay "Abdelkader: A Gift from the Desert" at the Clayton County Fair.

Two-Day Teacher Workshops sponsored by Humanities Iowa: Barbara Petzen, Education Director for Middle East Policy Council TeachMideast Program in Washington, DC, presented "Tools for Teaching about the Middle East and Islam." Workshops in Des Moines, Elkader, Sioux City and Iowa City were enthusiastically received by educators. Contact bpetzen@mepec.org.

Iowa Talented & Gifted (ITAG) Conference educators learned about AEP: Barbara Petzen presented "Glocalists at Work: Opening Windows from Iowa to the Muslim World" showcasing unexpected connections between students' lives and environment to those of Muslim societies around the world. Abdelkader was featured via Google Earth and other curriculum for classroom use.

Beyond Iowa

Georgetown University, Washington DC: *Commander of the Faithful* by John Kiser was adopted as main required reading by Ahmed Achrati for his 2011 high school summer course at Georgetown Arab Language and Culture Institute. Kiser addressed the class and essay winner Ben Bernatz of Iowa joined via Skype.

"Embodying Abraham Lincoln's precepts of "malice toward none...charity for all; firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right," Abdelkader's life as depicted in John W. Kiser's book is a continuous striving "to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace" with all faiths and all nations." Professor Ahmed Achrati, Academic Director for the School of Continuing Studies

Catholic Merrimack College in Massachusetts will introduce the 2011-2012 Abdelkader Essay Contest at high schools in the Boston area. Its Center for Jewish, Christian and Muslim Relations is committed to reconnecting with its Augustinian heritage in Annaba, formerly Hippo in Roman times.

John Kiser's *Commander of the Faithful* inspired noted children's author Elsa Marston to adapt the emir's story as a book for middle school students, stressing the experience of colonization.

U.S. Center for Citizen Diplomacy "Global Education Resource Guide" now includes the Abdelkader Education Project.

International Islamic Institute of Thought (IIIT) in Washington DC funds scholarship awards for Abdelkader Essay Contest for American Muslims. Students will study the importance of just and ethical leadership through the example of an Arab leader who influenced America and the West. Essay competitions are modeled in part after the Iowa essay contest in collaboration with AEP partner organization Oneblue.org. Contact sarah@oneblue.org.

Kinza Academy & Press, a homeschooling and publishing company with headquarters in San Ramon, CA, is interested in publishing a version of *Commander of the Faithful* appropriate for 8-12 year olds. Kinza Academy & Press, with connections to Muslim schools around the world, plans to market the book worldwide. www.kinzaacademy.com

Urdu version of *Commander of the Faithful* was published in Pakistan by Al-Sharia with a forward from Mr. Zaid-ul Rashadi, former head of the National Religious Council that determines whether laws passed by the parliament are in conflict with Islamic law. The book will be introduced to madrasa students to reflect on the true meaning of jihad.

Humanities Iowa Magazine "Voices from the Prairie" interviews with John Kiser about misunderstandings of Islam <http://www.uiowa.edu/~humiowa/pdf/VftPApril2011.pdf> (page 6); Kathy Garms about Abd el-Kader Education Project www.uiowa.edu/~humiowa/garms.

"Men We Love: Many Ways to Peace" by Mary Liepold, Editor-in-Chief of PeaceXPeace.org features John Kiser as "Bridgebuilder, Storyteller for Understanding." <http://www.peacexpeace.org/2011/06/men-we-love-building-a-culture-of-peace/>

Dr. Sayyid Sayeed, AEP supporter, addresses Lutheran Assembly: ELCA Bishop Mark Hanson welcomed Dr. Sayyid Sayeed, National Director for Office for Interfaith & Community Alliances of ISNA, to address their church-wide assembly. <http://blogs.elca.org/assemblynews/post/historic-greeting-from-the-islamic-society-of-north-america-18>

In His Own Words...
"Don't ask about a man's genealogy, but about his character, his life and his deeds. Drink the water. If it is pure, so is the source."
~ Emir Abdelkader

National Church and Synagogue Library Association: John Kiser presented the keynote luncheon address at their annual conference in Washington DC.

The National Defense University's AFPAK orientation group invited Kiser to brief government workers and military service personnel headed to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

John Wesley Seminary in Washington DC asked Kiser to speak with military chaplains about *Commander of the Faithful* and *The Monks of Tibhirine* as part of a film screening for *Of Gods and Men*.

University of Montreal's faculty of Theology and Religion organized Montreal conference around Emir Abd el-Kader and the West: Lessons of an inter-civilizational dialogue. Kiser spoke about Abdelkader's life as an expression of virtue and Christian behavior.

Honors Seminars in Indonesia and Nigeria with support from AEP partner organization Religions for Peace in NYC: Seminars are "team taught" by one Islamic and one Christian professor and focus on Kiser's books *Commander of the Faithful* and *The Monks of Tibhirine: Faith, Love and Terror in Algeria*. Both books intermingle history, religion and politics to celebrate positive, authentic expressions of Muslim and Christian faiths. Final papers will be written on the relevant lessons for their respective countries.

Film **Of Gods and Men** based on *The Monks of Tibhirine*

Cannes Film Festival award-winner Of Gods and Men brought to U.S. by Sony Classics was based on John Kiser's book *The Monks of Tibhirine* www.themonksoftibhirine.net, which was translated into French in 2006.

Humanities Iowa screened Of Gods and Men in Dubuque. John Kiser was invited to comment on the film and what was omitted. Expressions of Algerians' grief and shame, he felt, could have been presented, and the fact that the Superior's life had been saved by a Muslim during the war of independence.

Religion & Ethics Newsweekly - pbs.org: "John W. Kiser: Christian-Muslim Love" explains important missing elements of otherwise excellent award-winning French film **Of Gods and Men**. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/by-topic/john-w-kiser-christian-muslim-love/8476/>

A Different View...John Kiser's new website www.johnwkiser.com was launched.

To learn more, please visit our website www.abdelkaderproject.org. Thank you for following our project. We welcome all questions and comments. Contact kathygarms@yahoo.com.

Abdelkader Education Project Team...

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