



## Teaching Guide for Harvard Pluralism Cases

### The Pluralism Project

HARVARD  
UNIVERSITY

With AEP, The Pluralism Project's case study program produced a lively historical portrait of Muslims in Iowa, and paired it with three case-studies. The first case features Emir Abdelkader as the protagonist. Serving as companion pieces, the other two cases are contemporary stories situated in Iowa. These are powerful materials that can be used in the classroom in 45-minute periods.

#### What is Pluralism?

According to Diana Eck, Founder and Director, pluralism is:

- Energetic engagement with a diversity of people and practices;
- Active search for understanding (distinct from tolerance), across lines of difference; and
- An "encounter of commitments."

#### What is a case study?

A case is relatively short and accessible, noted for its exciting interactive pedagogy. Case Studies are educational materials, structured in two parts:

1. **Case A** is a brief description of the context and challenge of a protagonist, ending with tension around a risky, life-threatening decision. This allows student to intellectually and emotionally identify with the protagonist's possible courses of action.
2. **Case B** describes the actual real-life outcomes, which students only discover after they have thought through Case A.

**Curricular materials:**

[“Portrait of Cedar Rapids and America’s Mother Mosque”](#) can stand alone as a *descriptive piece* on a surprising little known history of Muslims in Iowa. It can also be used as background for the three cases that follow.

**Case #1. [Rumors in Damascus / In the Shadow of the Sword: Emir Abdelkader and Ethical Leadership](#)**

A five-page Case A and a one-page Case B tells the story of Emir Abd el-Kader, a 19th century Algerian statesman, scholar, and warrior, who is faced with a decision of whether or not to protect Christians under attack in Damascus in 1860. Students will identify with the protagonist as they try to answer questions such as: What do you think Abdelkader did? On what information do you base your views? What was at stake in Abdelkader’s choices? What did his wife and children say? How do you feel about his choices? What connections do you see for your own life and for our public lives?

**Case #2 [A Young Imam\(A\); A Young Imam\(B\)](#)**

A 7-page Case A and 3-page Case B tells the story of Imam Hassan Selim who faces a grueling schedule in his Midwestern primarily immigrant community. When presidential candidate Donald Trump comes to town for a rally, pressure builds on the young imam. What would you do in his shoes?

**Case #3 [The House on 6th Street \(A\); The House on 6th Street\(B\)](#)**

A two-page Case A and a two-page Case B depicts a house in Cedar Rapids, Iowa that is vandalized with anti-Muslim epithets and death threats. How do local citizens respond? Who are they? What happened and what would you have done?

## **Words and Concepts in the cases**

Qur'an - central (revealed) religious text of Islam

Sunnah – the acts and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed

Hadith – saying of the Prophet

Dhimmi – historical term for a non-Muslim 'protected' citizen of a Muslim state

Emir – commander, general, or prince

Imam – spiritual and intellectual leader in a Muslim community or mosque (house of worship)

Kurds – ethnic group belonging to Kurdistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria

Exile – forced resettlement or deportation from one's homeland

Druze – “the People of Monotheism;” a branch of Shi'a Islam

Colonialism - the policy or practice of full or partial political control over another country, occupying it and exploiting it economically

Ottoman Empire – in power from 1299 until after WWI

Refugee – a person forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

## **Select Themes:**

### **Moral/Religious Courage and Risky Decision-Making**

After Abdelkader's 17-year battle with French imperial powers in Algeria, why does he decide to save Christians in Damascus? What were the life-threatening risks he took and why?

### **Religious and National Identities**

Students may consider 'what are the boundaries or obligations of *my* religion and *my* nation? '

### **Jihad**

The narrative arc of Abdelkader's story offers the opportunity to engage in a conversation about “True” Jihad, a word used and misused. To tease out its meaning, students may explore Abdelkader's Jihad that includes the struggle for knowledge; the fight against colonialism; disagreements with local tribes who rejected his leadership; his struggles against anger, hatred, and despair in French prisons; the struggle to live in submission to God's will in Islam; the struggles for self-mastery, and for justice.

### **“Holy war”?**

Among some young Algerians today, Abdelkader’s reputation is tarnished. They ask, “What are you telling us ... to give up? He didn’t fight to the death.” AP History students, for example, may discuss the tension between fighting to the death for maximalist positions and the sacrifices of compromise or negotiation.

For group and individual in-person training or virtual guidance on how to use the case method,  
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