

THE COMPASSIONATE WARRIOR

*ABD EL-KADER
OF ALGERIA*

ELSA MARSTON

FOREWORD BY BARBARA PETZEN

ABOUT THE BOOK

A brilliant military strategist, superb horseman, statesman, philosopher, and renowned Muslim leader ... Emir Abd el-Kader (1807-1883) was an international celebrity in his own time, known for his generosity and kindness even towards enemies.

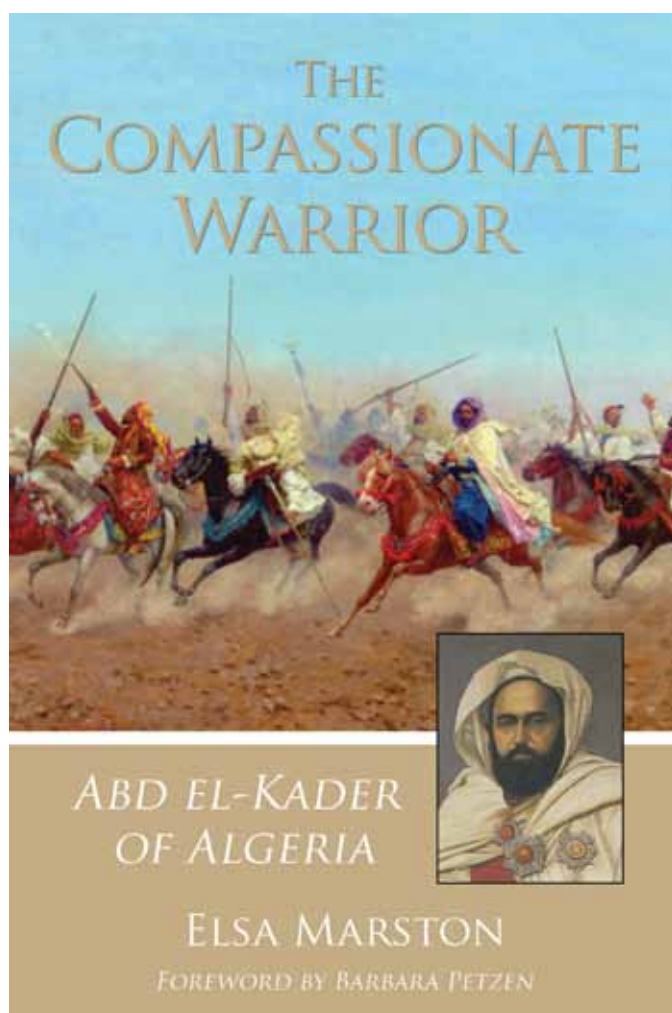
Today he is recognized as one of the noblest leaders of the 19th century and a pioneer in interfaith dialogue. This is the fascinating biography of the heroic Arab who led the resistance to the French conquest of Algeria, endured betrayal and imprisonment, and in 1860 in Syria, saved thousands of innocent Christians from mob violence, earning praise from leaders as diverse as Abraham Lincoln, Pope Pius IX, and Napoleon III.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ELSA MARSTON is the author of over a dozen books of fiction and non-fiction for children and young adults. She grew up in Boston, and from a young age was fascinated with the stories of ancient Egypt and the Middle East. She attended Harvard, the American University of Beirut, and Indiana University. Elsa lives in Bloomington, Indiana.

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THE COMPASSIONATE WARRIOR AND THE COMMON CORE

According to the Common Core State standards for grades 9-12, it is important for students to “initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-specific] topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.” The following questions are designed to facilitate these discussions and become a useful resource for teachers, parents, and librarians.

1. Throughout the 19th century, Abd el-Kader was described in many ways: nationalist, Algerian patriot, Muslim fanatic, theocrat, fundamentalist, social/political revolutionary, hero, exotic Arab chieftain, desert hawk, etc. How would you describe him?

2. If the Algerians had been successful in resisting the French conquest, what might have happened? Return of Ottoman control? Decline into tribal warfare? Or could Abd el-Kader have established his state?

3. Some French leaders believed in a “civilizing mission.” Does this make sense to you? Could Abd el-Kader have achieved some of the possible benefits of colonial rule (law and order, education, economic development, etc.), if given the chance?

4. Abd el-Kader and his father hated Ottoman rule—the outsiders who ruled only for their own benefit, keeping the great majority of people suppressed. So, in trying to build his own state, why didn’t Abd el-Kader aim for a more united society and democratic system of government?

5. Since Abd el-Kader did not want to demonstrate his power by means of extravagance, luxurious lifestyle, and other ways of asserting personal superiority over others, how *did* he win the support of the tribes?

6. The way Abd el-Kader and the French *worked together* for some years (under the treaties with Desmichelles and Bugeaud) is a surprising development in the Emir’s resistance campaign. Would you say this suggests opportunism, or possibly even betrayal of his people? Or how might you describe his reasoning in these situations?

7. When Abd el-Kader had the chance to work with other popular resistance fighters, especially “Bou Maza,” it seems he didn’t take advantage of the opportunity. Was this wise, in your view, or a strategic mistake?

8. The French (military, government, and public) had mixed views of Abd el-Kader: some admired him, some regarded him as “savage, a monster.” If you were one of the Emir’s right-hand men, how would you advise him to handle his “public relations”?

9. Was it really necessary—or a waste of manpower, resources, and time—for the Emir to attack Tijani, the powerful man with a fortress deep in the Sahara desert?

10. Do you think you could have reacted as Abd el-Kader did when Léon Roches revealed that he had deceived the Emir and had not, in fact, converted to Islam? Does it seem to you that Abd el-Kader may sometimes have trusted other people, especially his adversaries, a little too readily?

11. Did Abd el-Kader give up his war of resistance too easily? Should he have kept on fighting?

12. How would you explain the way Abd el-Kader—in spite of everything bad the French did to him, his people, and country—came to admire his former enemies and their civilization so much? What do you think of his loyalty to Napoleon III?

13. When he arrived in Damascus, would it have been better if Abd el-Kader had tried to fit in with the local religious leaders, even if he wasn’t favorably impressed by them?

14. After the riots of 1860, would it have been wise of Abd el-Kader to say that he saved the Christians *primarily* to show good will for Christians and Christianity? What do you think of his actual explanation?

15. What might Abd el-Kader—who felt that God wanted humankind to benefit from technological progress—think about the technological advances of our time (computers, space exploration, nuclear war, you name it!)?

16. Judging from the recent books about Abd el-Kader, it appears that he did not take much interest in improving the lives of women. Do you think that’s a fair conclusion? If so, how would you explain it?

17. What do you suppose Abd el-Kader would think of the rise of extremist Islamic groups today?

18. Which do you think would be the most effective way(s) to counter religious extremism: To publicly argue against it? To show how extremist leaders can actually weaken the religion they promote? To emphasize education of the people (i.e., not indoctrination)? To live a quiet but good life, i.e., to try always to be a good Muslim, Christian, Jew, etc., and influence people by being a model of one’s beliefs?

19. Abd el-Kader, a devout Muslim, has been called an “interfaith bridge-builder.” How would you explain his efforts to find common ground, understanding, and acceptance among religions, especially Islam and Christianity? In your view, why do so many people still resist efforts toward interfaith harmony?

20. How do you think Abd el-Kader’s attitudes and beliefs on many things—such as interfaith dialogue, compassion toward others including the enemy, open-mindedness regarding other ideas and cultures—can be applied today?

