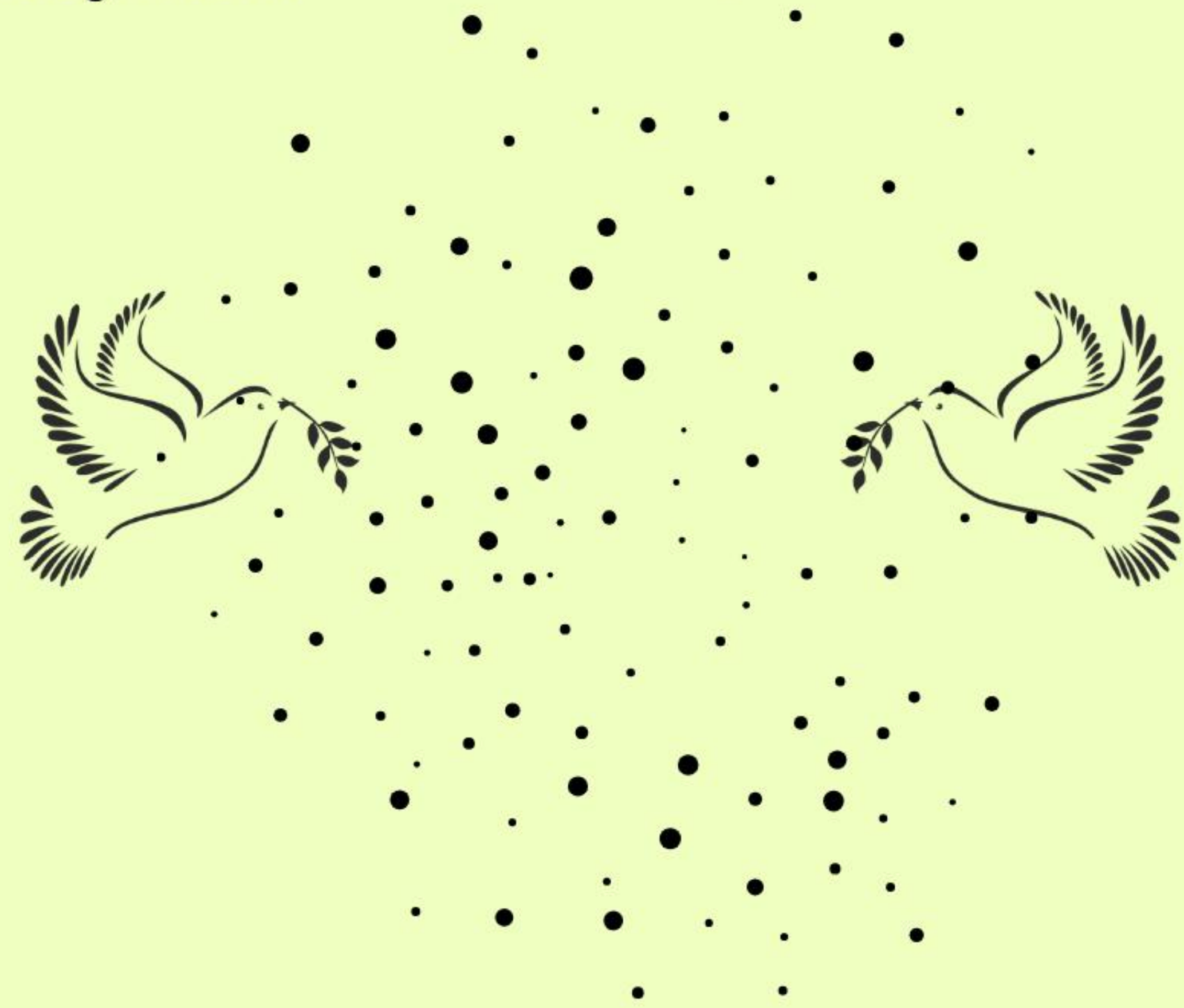


Abstract

This paper examines the life and legacy of Reverend Kelly Miller Smith, highlighting the pivotal role of local leadership in the Civil Rights Movement and questioning why figures like Smith are celebrated primarily within their communities rather than nationally. By examining Smith's early life, education, activism, and participation in events like the Nashville sit-ins and the NAACP, this study highlights his significant impact. A comparison with John Lewis, a nationally recognized leader, explores the dynamics of civil rights leadership, focusing on the disparities between local and national recognition.



Research Question

Expanding our understanding of leadership beyond the national spotlight allows for a more comprehensive appreciation of the movement and its diverse range of voices.



KELLY MILLER SMITH: THE ROLE AND RECOGNITION OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Kenneddi Mastin

Life and Legacy

Reverend Kelly Miller Smith was a significant Civil Rights leader who was inspired by the teachings of Martin Luther King, known for his commitment to nonviolence and equality. Smith pursued higher education at Morehouse College and Howard University School of Divinity, later becoming assistant Dean at Vanderbilt Divinity School. As president of the Nashville NAACP, he played a key role in advocating for desegregation following the 1954 Supreme Court ruling against school segregation.

Smith became the reverend of First Baptist Church Capitol Hill in 1951, a position he held for over 30 years. In 1958, the Kelly Miller Smith Foundation was established with the mission of advancing the effectiveness of social justice activism and activists through engagement, education, preparation, and activation, inspired by his teachings and legacy. He played a leading role in the 1960 Nashville sit-ins, training students—including future leaders like Representative John Lewis and Diane Nash—in nonviolent protest tactics to garner sympathy and support for the movement.

Studying someone like Kelly Miller Smith is important because his leadership and activism played a crucial role in the Civil Rights Movement, particularly in advancing desegregation and nonviolent protest strategies. His work in training young activists, including John Lewis and Diane Nash, helped shape the movement's success and long-term impact. As a religious leader and educator, Smith not only fought for equality but also laid the foundation for future generations of social justice advocates. His legacy, preserved through the Kelly Miller Smith Foundation, continues to inspire and educate activists today, making his contributions highly relevant to ongoing struggles for justice and equity.



Bibliography



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