

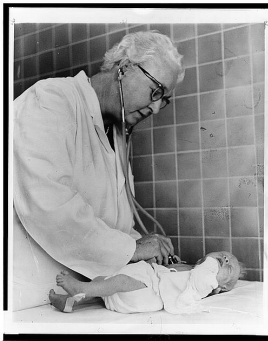


A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



December 2024 Her Story ENewsletter Focus on Newborns

In 1952 when Dr. Virginia Apgar developed her score to assess the health of newborns and determine what medical attention they required, most of the focus at a baby's birth was on the mother. Another woman of accomplishment was Marion Downs, who believed that testing newborns for hearing loss could save years of struggle by identifying who needed assistance at a much earlier time than was the practice. Let's learn about these two women who focused on newborns.



Dr. Virginia Apgar developed the "Apgar Score" today used worldwide at one minute and five minutes after birth to determine if a baby needs medical assistance. The Apgar Score has saved the lives of countless newborn babies. The higher the score, the better! The 10-point score assigns a 0, 1, or 2 to each category: A – Appearance, P – Pulse, G – Grimace, A – Activity, and R – Respiration.

After being one of the few women admitted to the Columbia University College of Physicians, Apgar wanted to become a surgeon. However, she was told that at this time in our country's history (the early 1930's), she would starve – because no one would want a woman surgeon! So, Apgar shifted her focus to anesthesiology. She became the Director of Anesthesiology, the first woman to head any department at the University. Another first for Dr.

Apgar was when she became the first woman full professor at the University. After leaving Columbia, she served as an executive with the March of Dimes Foundation, continuing her work to identify and prevent birth defects. Dr. Apgar has been featured on a U.S. postage stamp and has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



The "Mother of Pediatric Audiology," **Marion Downs**, worked for decades to have newborn hearing screening implemented universally. When she began her efforts, most children with hearing problems did not receive hearing aids until three years of age and her theories and efforts were regarded as sacrilege. She pursued her quest despite relentless opposition from the primarily male physicians – pediatricians and otolaryngologists – who thought she was wrong. She was successful not only in the U.S. but in many countries around the world, with the World Health Organization endorsing universal newborn hearing screening (UNHS). This practice is now the standard protocol for hearing loss for newborns around the world today. Hundreds of thousands of babies each year benefit from her work.

In collaboration with Dr. Jerry Northern, Downs wrote the 1974 book *Hearing in Children* which was the first textbook on pediatric audiology. It has gone through multiple editions, been translated into foreign languages, and, for thousands of audiologists-in-training, the book is their foundation to learn how to evaluate and manage children with hearing loss.

Dr. Virginia Apgar and Marion Downs are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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J189 | Greenwood Village, CO 80112 US

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