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Henrietta Leavitt, Pioneer in measuring the distances to the stars

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Henrietta Leavitt, one of the so-called women computers working at the Harvard College Observatory in the early twentieth century, pioneered a new and extremely important method of measuring the distances to the stars. Nearly deaf, poorly paid, and receiving very little recognition in her lifetime, Leavitt's distance-determination method was used by other astronomers to measure the size of the Milky Way, to measure the distances to other galaxies, and to conclude that our universe is expanding, a conclusion central to the Big Bang model. The importance of Leavitt's work to astronomy, physics, and a conception of our cosmic origins cannot be overstated. In this talk, I will discuss the life of Leavitt, her work, and her importance to science.