

Over the past year, I have spent countless hours researching and writing about the influence of elite audiences on the U.S. Supreme Court's decision-making process. However, throughout my research, I came to an important realization about the law. It is not just lawyers or judges that dictate the streams of precedent that have brought that law to where it is or where it will go. Instead, there are people who whisper in the ears of those with the power to change the laws for better or worse. Sometimes they come in the form of politicians aimed at creating policies that benefit themselves the most or lobbyists aimed at placing profit over people. However, occasionally they come in the form of those like Malvina Shanklin Harlan, who spent her life behind the curtains, gently influencing her powerful husband to realize the full potential of what the United States could be if everyone were to have the same rights and privileges.

It was in late Justice Ruther Bader Ginsburg's *In My Own Words* where I first learned about Malvina Shanklin Harlan. Justice Ginsburg, another legal hero of mine, wrote a chapter on her fight to get Harlan's autobiography *Some Memories of a Long Life* published. In the chapter, she told the story of a woman who, despite being taught by her mother to keep her opinions to herself in her marriage, was unafraid to have her own voice and mind. After reading *Some Memories of a Long Life*, her influence on her husband, Justice John Marshall Harlan, became apparent. Justice Harlan grew up in a slave-owning family and opposed the abolitionist movement, yet Malvina Shanklin Harland was vehemently anti-slavery. She came from a family that shared her abolitionist values, and that family warned her that Justice Harlan's pro-slavery position was one she was expected to accept as her own. However, Malvina Shanklin Harlan never did. Despite moving to antebellum Kentucky, she maintained her abolitionist stance and gently influenced her husband's position on the issue. Eventually, Justice John Marshall Harlan would become the lone dissenter in *Plessy v. Ferguson* due to, in part, his wife's advocacy for

civil rights. Malvina Shanklin Harlan used her position to influence legal policy with grace and for the betterment of society. She used her voice during a time when women were supposed to keep their opinions to themselves, or better yet, have no opinions at all. Most of her work has gone unnoticed and unappreciated as she remained hidden in the background as she was most of her life. However, since learning of her, my outlook on the law has never been the same.

First, it is because of women like her that I will have to opportunity to attend law school. Women who never had the opportunity to do such things but refused to let it mean they would have no influence. Thus, she has given me a new appreciation for the privilege that attending law school is. She also taught me the importance of using your advocacy and influence for good. She advocated to her husband graciously and used her influence for issues that matter, and in doing so, she was able to change the mind of a powerful man in a time when men rarely listened to women. She also expected no recognition for her efforts but continued anyway. As a result, Malvina Shanklin Harlan reminded me that while there may be times I feel underappreciated, I have chosen this profession because bringing even the smallest amount of justice to someone is what I have always wanted to do. Malvina Shanklin Harlan, while not a lawyer, changed the path of American society behind the curtains without anyone realizing it. Because of her and the difference she has made, I have remained motivated and determined to use my influence for good without seeking praise throughout my career in law.