

Ghosts and Groceries: The Subtly Feminist Act of Claiming My Inheritance

Katie W. Powell

Abstract: This article engages with the idea of subtle feminism through tracing the genealogy of the author's new 1926 suburban Midwestern home. By engaging in storied community listening, the author works to engage with those who have lived in the home before her in order to claim the inheritance of both subtle privilege and subtle feminism that they have left her. By investigating the "objective" history of her home alongside the critical lens of story, the author begins to find her place in her community today. Claiming her own subtle privilege alongside the subtly feminist act of running a home allows the author to explore the ways she is both haunted by and responsible for the inheritance that is hers to claim.

Tags: [story](#), [community listening](#), [whiteness](#), [critical reflection](#), [spatial justice](#), [domestic](#)

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[Seller Name] for valuable consideration paid, grant with general warranty covenants to Katherine and Tyler Powell, for their joint lives, remainder to the survivor of them, their heirs, and assigns, whose mailing address is [address], the following real property: [property description]. Subject to taxes and assessments which are now or may hereafter become liens on said premises and except conditions, restrictions, and easements, if any contained in former instruments of record for said premises, subject to all of which this conveyance is made.

Be it remembered, the foregoing document was acknowledged before me, a notary public, for the said county and state, this 30 day of June, 2022, by [seller name], grantors in the foregoing deed, and acknowledged the signing thereof to be their voluntary act or deed. (Hamilton County Deed Book 14009, p. 147)

Be It Remembered: An Introduction

I've noticed a subtle shift in the way I view the world, the way I see myself as a white woman, since I became a mother. My definition of my world, for starters, has shrunk considerably and often simply encompasses the walls of my home. From the steep steps of the basement to do laundry multiple times a week, to the schlepping of groceries through the front door and into the kitchen, to the early morning sips of coffee

Katie W. Powell is an Assistant Professor Educator in the Department of English in the University of Cincinnati's, Rhetoric and Professional Writing track. Since graduating from the University of Arkansas, she has used her writing to reflect on how to listen as a white woman, scholar, and mother in community groups and in her new home in Cincinnati. These reflections can be seen in a forthcoming book chapter on community listening, and in an upcoming special issue of *College English*, both of which examine white language and white positioning. Her teaching and writing directly reflect the ways she considers whiteness and her own positionality within these spaces.

I've taken over a laptop scrambling to cram a day's worth of work into a few hours before a sick baby wakes up, I find myself sounding more and more like my own mother when I am finally able to complete one simple task, finish a thought, or string together an email. These moments, though subtle, feel like an act of resistance against the humdrum of life with littles, a kind of feminist act. But even then, I think to myself, isn't creating a safe place for my daughters to land, a world where my 3-year-old wants to be a police officer who drives a firetruck, its own sort of subtle feminism? Subtle choices that run deep.

And then of course, I consider the community outside the steps of my home, and the subtle privileges I am part of that run deep, so deep. We bought a 1926 craftsman home in a small suburb outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, called Wyoming, and I regularly walk my kids to one of 5 or 6 parks in the area. As we walk, a blonde, white mother with two blonde, white children, I notice waves and smiles from cars driving past, responses that are not mimicked when our West African immigrant neighbors cycle to the ATM near our home, or when a Hispanic family leaves the laundromat across the street on Sunday afternoons. Wyoming, one suburb in one city in one state in our nation, perfectly exemplifies the national phenomenon of what Bonilla-Silva calls "the invisible weight of whiteness" (Bonilla-Silva). As a white, educated, financially stable mother, I hold the privilege of those that have carved out a default space for white privileged others to build this home, to build this community. But this legacy is subtle, very sneaky, almost subversive. These subtleties (that honestly are not all that subtle) run deep and uphold a dynamic that preferences my kids over others, that keeps non-white people from moving to my neighborhood, that results in police violence and state-sanctioned murder under the guise of protecting white women like me.

We think of big things when we think of inheritances. Massive estates. Entire libraries. Trust funds. As I've found my place in Cincinnati, in an older home in a nice suburb, I believe I've inherited a big thing. To engage in a subtly feminist act, I seek to claim my inheritance, through the lens of my home, in both the privileges and the oppression that such an inheritance affords. I choose home as the center for exploring, enacting, subtle feminism, because I know, from this very call, that these concerns are subtle, quiet, hidden, and haunting the minds of other white women, scholars, feminists. As a technical communications scholar, I find comfort in the "objective" truth that the deeds telling my home's history provide us (see epistle above). As a feminist, the manager of a home, and a mother, I know there is more to read, understand, and claim as I work, clean, eat, drive, fold, scrub, love, while trying to listen and hear the subtle feminism, the ghosts, the hauntings, of home.

As part of holding the tension between technical communicator (seeker of the "objective") and subtle feminist (seeker of the subtle), I model my journey after the official steps for claiming one's inheritance ("Inheritance Funding"). Like any good lawyer would suggest, I first establish our terminology and ensure you all, the conveyors, are appraised of my methodology. Step 1, authenticating the last will, involves sharing the official documentation of my home and community, the ways in which my claim is "credible" and therefore worthy of consideration. Step 2, Appointing the Executor, involves me engaging in storied community listening to hear the claims, the connections, the struggles I face as I engage with the legacy of the women who

have lived here before me, my ghosts. Step 3, locating the deceased's assets and assessing their value, involves a broader exploration into the assets (burdens) my ghosts have left me with, and I am haunted by, namely of domestic inheritance, gendered oppression, and of course white privilege. And finally, Step 4 involves informing creditors and paying your debts. I listen, and I hear, the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance. But to truly, completely claim it, I must pay my debt and live out my legacy.

The Foregoing Document: Definitions

My eighteen-page mortgage deed begins with a grounding of "Definitions," stating that "words used in multiple sections of this document are defined below." Therefore, I begin with the same sort of grounding, addressing the ways in which I understand terms that help me claim inheritance in my home as a means of enacting subtle feminism.

Subtle privilege and subtle feminism. As established in my introduction, I have found great resonance in the idea of subtle, namely as I explore its practices and enactments in my daily home life. I consider subtle privilege to be those undercurrents of our life and work that give us advantages, whether earned or not. In my case, I function under the often unnamed reality that many of these subtle privileges are part of being white, and being white in America (Kennedy et al.; Tuck and Ree; Powell; Martinez). Subtle feminism, on the other hand, is the small, quiet pockets of rhetorical resistance to maintained systems that oppress others. As do many in this contribution, I pull this definition by engaging in strategic contemplation (Royster and Kirsch), from questioning if I am "feminist enough" (Gay), and from listening to the often-invisibilized labor of the home (Monberg; Kannan). Instead of seeing subtle privilege as the antithesis to subtle feminism, I believe they work alongside each other, and acknowledging one through our rhetorical strategies and our stories is a necessary part of enacting the other.

Haunting: In acknowledging my subtle privilege, it's impossible not to see the legacy of this privilege, a legacy best described for me as a white person as haunting. Hearing other white scholars claim haunting, as Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe do in *Rhetorics of Whiteness*, helps illustrate the pervasiveness of this privilege in every part of my life. The authors point out that our language is haunted by the assumption that mainstream= white. They also say, however, that "whiteness can haunt more than just a term. It can haunt entire texts and people's actions and their identities as well as cultural sites and events at particular historical moments" (16). This exploration of subtle feminism has reminded many of us to examine the ways in which the term feminism is haunted by whiteness throughout history, and in turn the ways perhaps I as a white woman am haunted by the idea of "feminist enough."

Ghosts and Ancestors: Part of enacting subtly feminist rhetoric means seeking out fellow white people who have curated this haunting (Powell and Bratta). While I've been inspired by many texts on the idea of ancestorship, particularly from an Indigenous (Powell; Riley-Mukavetz) and African American (Royster; Gumbs; Pritchard) perspective, I prefer to think of my white house ancestors whose fellow privileges haunt

me as much as they benefit me, as ghosts. Lillian Smith, a white activist, shares in her autobiography *Killers of the Dream*, of “ghosts” that she learned of as a child, ghosts that taught her the contradictory nature of a vindictive God who loved unconditionally yet allowed her community to turn a blind eye to injustices facing her Black community members. My ancestors then, are my “house ghosts,” other white women who have lived in my home, who have shared in my subtle privileges (and hopefully some of my acts of subtle feminism), and haunt me.

Inheritance: But what have these ghosts haunted me with? What is the throughline of claiming my subtle privilege, what is the reason to enact my subtle feminism? Google defines inheritance as “the practice of receiving private property, titles, debts, entitlements, privileges, rights, and obligations (“Inheritance”). Certainly, I have received these same privileges, made most manifest in the placement of my home. The idea of inheritance is closely connected to the idea of heritage, and the rhetorics of inheritance/heritage reveal the often undercurrent of the (white) status quo at play. As James Chase Sanchez says in an article about the language of white supremacy, “White people camouflage “heritage” to refer to their specific histories and memories” (52). Inheritance, like heritage, is stated as a signifier to a particular group while feeling harmless to the general public. My definition of inheritance then, is unspoken, unacknowledged, subtly privileged rhetoric that leads to a haunting. I therefore engage in subtly feminist rhetoric to claim my inheritance, both in the subtle privileges of this home and the subtly feminist act of running this home.

For Valuable Consideration Paid: The Methodology

My dissertation, written just a few years ago, wrestled with my role as a white woman in an inter-racial community group working to install a plaque telling a more complete story of a lynching in our area. Tense conversations, questioned choices, and understanding my own role led to the enactment and study of storied community listening, which I define as an embedded approach to listening that involves critical reflection with oneself, through the use of story, and an active, reciprocal approach to working alongside a community (Powell, forthcoming). This approach was drawn from a critical examination of my positionality as a white female scholar not inherently “from” the place I was writing about. In this article, then, I practice a new kind of storied community listening as I engage in the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance. Part of this tracing, this telling, is to hear the subtly feminist rhetoric both of the fellow privileged white women that have lived within these walls, my ghosts, and the ways in which these subtly feminist acts have perpetuated the injustices of others, the hauntings we are left with.

I want to explore, dive into, and reckon with the privilege that added our name to the deed, to the long list of dreamers, doers, and toilers on this stretch of land. To do so, I first and foremost must listen. My introduction to the concept of listening came from Krista Ratcliffe, who explicitly grapples with the idea of rhetorical listening as a white person. Ratcliffe defines rhetorical listening as “a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture” (109). Unlike rhetorical listening, community listening involves a collaboration *with* the community, not for or to any given community. In

a special issue of the *Community Literacy Journal*, Fishman and Rosenberg address the idea of community listening, or “a literacy practice that involves deep, direct engagement with individuals and groups working to address urgent issues in everyday life, issues anchored by long histories and complicated by competing interpretations as well as clashing modes of expression” (1). My “community” in this project is the legacy, the inheritance, of women who have lived in this home before me. One of many privileges I share with my ghosts is that it is very easy to find and name them, to place them in our community’s history. They exist on public records, in the deeds and mortgages that are still carefully preserved by our County Auditor’s office.

What I ultimately want to grapple with, to claim, is the pervasive whiteness, privilege, and false sense of objectivity that make up the story of my house. I know that my story is listed in technical documents, but how do I find it? And where/how do I feminize such “objective” rhetoric in subtle ways? While story has its roots in indigenous rhetorics, I am perhaps most drawn to the idea of story through the concept of counterstory used by critical race theory scholars. Aja Martinez defines counterstory as “the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures embedded in standardized majoritarian methodologies” (3). The disruption of a mere string of deeds and wills and marriage licenses allows for an examination of where and how oppressed people have pushed against this oppression and have continued to thrive alongside the building of my home and the construction of my community’s legacy. This project, then, is inspired by learning from these scholars’ work with counterstory and building on the ways technical communicators have begun to weave story (Petersen and Walton; Haas) to offer a version of storied community listening that is attuned to what’s “not said” in the rhetoric of technical documents. Reading between the lines, engaging in storied community listening to claim my inheritance, provides an avenue for knowing, encountering, and uncovering subtle privileges and subtly feminist rhetoric.

Step 1: Authenticate the Last Will and Testament

What is the following “real property” in question? And who gets to authenticate it?

The first step in claiming one’s inheritance, according to the all-knowing Google, is to authenticate your will (“Inheritance Funding”). Authenticating your will, or proving its legitimacy, allows it to pass for objective/factual/truthful. Therefore, the first step I must take is engaging with these “objective truths,” “facts” that we know from the deeds, wills, mortgages, and other documentation considered legitimate or credible throughout history. In the settler history/ghost story telling of our land, our plat became designated for home life in 1875, when Grant H. Burrows became the president of the Park Place Land and Building Company, and worked to develop the farm into a subdivision. According to the local history of our town, “Park Place was designed to give people of moderate means ‘the opportunity to purchase homes on easy terms and within their financial ability’” (Guckenberger 40). One of those people of moderate means appears to be Lydia Thorton, who is listed as the only name on a deed of purchase from Edward Allen in 1875. Is the fact that a single woman is listed on the deed an example of subtly feminist rhetoric? How was it even possible, in 1875, to have a single woman’s name on the deed? These objective records then, are not enough to authenticate the

kind of claim I have, the legacy of my inheritance. True authentication comes from critically imagining, storing, the ways in which this one mark on a deed is perhaps its own subtly feminist act. But let's keep going.

Lydia Thorton sold it to Samuel Goodman in August 1882. Though she is still listed as the primary, her husband John Thorton is also listed next to her on this 1882 deed. Samuel Goodman married Ida Wilder on June 21st, 1883, so perhaps they built a home together on this land, though I've yet to find the records for such. The couple had two children, one in 1886 and one in 1890, some of the many children that have shaped their sense of the world on my soil. The Goodman family kept the house until 1906, when they sold "All of lot numbered 65 (65) upon a plat of subdivision of Park Place, as made by the Park Place Land and Building Company" to Lena Stolz (*Hamilton County Deed Book* 943, 237). Lena Stolz originally owned all of Lot 65, which covers the first 200 feet of Winton Avenue from Springfield Pike (heading West). The 1906 City Directory, the year that Lena Stolz came into ownership of our land, features a riveting opening section entitled "Story of a Year's Progress" (Williams). Writers of the text tell the reader that reading this review "cannot be other than pleasant reading to everyone interested in the city's welfare and progress" (6). The overview concludes with updates on the growth of school systems, ending by saying, "In every way—in population, in business and in prosperity—the year has been one in which every Cincinnati can take just pride" (10). There is a clear rhetoric of progress here, citing alongside the journey of my house the growth of the city. The subtle privilege, however, lies in the inclusion of words like "pleasant reading to everyone interested," or "in every way." This subtle privilege is coded, as most privilege often is, in the haunting rhetoric of whiteness.

Such subtle privilege is found not just in Cincinnati's history, but Wyoming's as well. Geo. Buzz Guckenberger, who wrote "Wyoming: A Retrospective" as part of a celebration of the 125th anniversary of the city's founding, has an equally uplifting take on the prospects of the city during these two formative years for my land. In January 1906, he cites an advertisement for a circus in Wyoming that said "there are thousands just a few miles away who have never heard of us. That some of these may know that we are alive; that our town is the most beautiful suburb of the great City of Cincinnati; and that we ourselves may have the opportunity to renew old acquaintances and form new" (64). One can imagine the kinds of acquaintances Lena might have renewed, the new ones she might have formed. And we can infer that these thousands that have not heard of Wyoming are the oppressed, invisible citizens of the city. Lena then, as she worked and loved on our land, was likely part of perpetuating these subtle privileges, even as she worked to give me "the most beautiful suburb" that I now inherit.

Based on the 1910 city directory, Lena and her husband John owned a grocery store very close to where our home is. Like many of the names in this history, Lena and John are both first-generation Americans. According to 1910 census records, their fathers were both born in Germany. In 1910 John was listed as a "teamster" and Lena a homemaker. The Stolzes had 4 children; 3 daughters (Lula, Margaret, Alice) and one son (John Jr.) ("Ancestry.com"). Here again, the records are not enough to "authenticate" the inheritance of this home. Lena is a single woman listed on the deed, a rhetorical artifact that points to her own

subtly feminist act. And though census records reveal her German roots, they can't tell us of the struggles she and her husband faced as first-generation Americans. Corinna Horst used her dissertation to explore the lives and culture of German immigrant women. She writes that:

In Cincinnati German immigrant women lived in complex environments of multiple 'Gemeinschaften.' Rather than 'just' being daughters, wives, or mothers, German immigrant women were members of multiple spheres and communities. They were friends, neighbors, helpers, workers, associational members, congregation members, and Cincinnatians. Their daily lives were characterized by negotiating the various communities of which they were a part; their identities within different "Gemeinschaften" were not mutually exclusive but co-existed, further enhancing the constantly changing nature of the entire ethnic community. Closeness, common experiences, and shared interests in the immediate environment, brought German immigrant women together. Independence and interdependence shaped their lives. (Horst 1)

Horst portrays for us the ways in which German womanhood was cast as industrious, immutable, and pleasant. Reading between the lines and enacting a critical reflection with myself, as my storied community listening approach suggests, I can see the impossibilities that my ghosts faced— to claim a new world, to serve as the helm of myriad communities, to navigate what being a woman means in those trying times. These "authentic records" can't show us the struggles of a homemaker, a homemaker with four children, trying to make money and raise kids right, two of the same stressors that kept me awake last night. To engage in the subtly feminist act of interrogating this rhetoric, then, requires story.

In the time that Lena had our entire property, she did a few things with it. In 1921, she sold part of it to "H and M Wuebkenberg" (*Hamilton County Deed Book 44, 338*). Our current lot begins 150 feet into Winton Ave from Springfield Pike, and extends 50 feet along it. Lena sold Herman and Marguerite Wuebkenberg a portion of that portion of the lot, where it appears they built a home using "Glendale Building & Land Company" mortgage in 1922 (*Hamilton County Deed Book 1141, 377*). In 1924, she conveyed "The East 100 feet and the West 25 feet...and being the same premise (less a strip fronting 75 feet on the South side of Winton Avenue) for therefull depth of said lot, lying 100 ft west on the east line of said lot"-- basically, everything else— to her husband, John L Stolz (*Hamilton County Deed Book 44, 340*). Interestingly, this made him the full and sole owner, perhaps a rhetorical artifact of subtle privilege falling back to the man, or head of the house. Alice, the youngest daughter of the Stolz's, married Karl Goertemiller on September 30th, 1925. Likely in preparation for their wedding, John and Lena sold part of Lot 65 to Karl in June of that year. H&M Wuebkenberg sold the other part to Karl in September of that year (*Hamilton County Deed Book 44, 340*). This is when our plot as it stands was ultimately created, so it can be presumed that this is when and where our home was built. Karl took out a mortgage with the Glendale Building and Land Company in November of that year (*Hamilton County Mortgage Book 1303, 53*), and is listed as living at our address, with Alice, in the 1930 Census ("Ancestry.com").

Authenticating my claim to my inheritance, through these primary and secondary sources, reveals that the language surrounding my home is part of a long story of subtle privileges, my legacy one of many women who have lived, homed, labored, and loved within these walls, in this city of progress, in a country of constant change. In trying to authenticate this inheritance, I use storied community listening to discern the subtle ways that the wills, the deeds, even the secondary sources are not enough. My named ghosts—Lydia, Ida, Lena, Marguerite, and Alice—are remembered in gendered and oppressed ways—the fact that a sole woman on the deed is mysterious and unusual, the flippant (or finite) role of “homemaker” throughout the census, and the connection of land to marriage, as was the impetus for the four walls I now write in. I’m haunted by not just these women, but the larger subtle privileges that previous owners of my home have held. I’ve inherited this subtle privilege, and I join in the rhetoric of progress. The subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance, however, shows a deep well of oppression for others that is not quiet or subtle at all.

Step 2: Appoint the Executor

What claim do we, and the “remainder to the survivor of them” have on this land?

The second step in claiming one’s inheritance is to appoint an executor. For me, this appointment has come in occupying this home in this privileged suburb. We gained access to this home by knowing our realtor through a friend, who knew the homeowners, who sold it to us off the market. When I see people around town hoping to get into Wyoming, they still all say some version of “how did you land in Wyoming???” From the Facebook posts I see looking for homes for sale in Wyoming to the veiled racism in the picturesque attitudes the town takes of who “should” live here (see my opening story), engaging in the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance means examining my role as executor, my legacy.

At any given point in my home’s history, I can find people who have not simply been on a similar path as me, but been on my exact same path out of our door and into our city. I see, through our placement and positioning in the city then and now, the subtle privileges we hold. At age 26, Karl and Alice Goertemiller were married and Karl took out a mortgage to build our home. At age 30 and 31, the 1930 census reports that they have no children, and Alice stayed at home while Karl worked as a chemist at a soap plant (“Ancestry.com”). How might Alice have viewed her circumstances, her role, spending so much time within the walls in which I still find myself? It is clear in diving into the history of my quaint suburb that Alice Stolz Goertemiller likely fell on the side of privilege. Despite her rise from a young spouse into adulthood and its limitations, her confusing place as a first-generation German American and her likely struggles navigating the sacred yet monotonous work of managing our home, the advantages she was given enabled her to benefit from the subtle privileges that I still feel as I traverse my creaky floorboards today.

Part of claiming my inheritance, authenticating my legitimacy as executor, means finding the honor and the struggle in what my ghosts have faced. The subtly feminist act of claiming this inheritance, howev-

er, is to see the inherent ways in which others have been left out of my home's story. The renters who haven't had the institutional wealth or privilege to purchase. The laborers who added the foundation, laid the brick, and fixed the roof. The sweat that poured from the guys who moved our furniture in, diagnosed our broken dryer, or synced up the outlets and light switches in our basement. The Miami, Shawnee, Hopewell and Adena peoples who lived, homed, and dreamed here on what might have been, what is, sacred ground, before being forcibly removed. Each and every one of the people I draw from, namely the female scholars of color I continually seek for inspiration, remind me of the privileges that I'm afforded because I'm white (Martinez; Lorde). Because I'm able-bodied. Because I'm binary in my gender identity. Because I'm partnered and therefore financially stable. Because even without my partner, I have the financial safety net of my family. So perhaps (white, middle-class) subtle feminism means not only bringing to light the invisible, but un-invisibilizing my race. In "Sick Woman Theory," Hedva admonishes that "Whiteness is what allows for such oblivious neutrality: it is the premise of blankness, the presumption of the universal" (Hedva). What these old texts are not bringing to light is an awareness of race, an acknowledgement of the privilege that exists by being a white immigrant, even alongside the challenges that come with being a female German immigrant.

As I looked through the secondary sources cited in the process of authenticating my will, the idea of race and inclusion does not come up among the hopeful rhetoric of progress. Though there is a brief mention of "transients," both of these city directories essentially paint a picture of a fully inclusive, welcoming, and enriching space. Other, firsthand accounts of "Cincinnati's Colored Citizens," however, suggest otherwise. As Karl and Alice were, likely, working to construct their dream home, Dabney tells the story of a community nowhere close to equal citizenship. Dabney describes his work in saying, "Have strayed far from the cold, formal, stereotyped historical volume in efforts to show the soul as well as the body of a people, who are so little known, so little understood and, for so many years, so much oppressed because of such misunderstanding" (5). And let's not forget, what the records don't show, what was happening in the land of Karl and Alice's grandparents at that time—the rise of Nazi power, Nazi regime, and the likely anti-German sentiment they were certain to face in this new home, sentiment that can't be seen on a census outside of the category "birth-place of father." And while these texts themselves aren't instances of subtly feminist rhetoric, it is my hope that including them alongside my subtle privileges can be—making space, finding a pocket, for resistance to the common narrative.

So alongside their hardships and outside of our home lies a long and brutal history of Indigenous dispossession, settler colonialism, housing segregation, and, even today, under the guise of inclusion, a sort of color-blind racism or abstract liberalism in my small "progressive" town (Bonilla-Silva). Where are the stories of others left out, and what does that mean to my own home legacy? Part of listening and writing this subtly feminist act, then, means challenging myself to contextualize my own story alongside the collective story of settler feminism. To declare myself an appropriate executor, then I need to remember the ways in which, even in our invisibleness, my ghosts and I have managed, continue to manage, to invisibilize others.

Step 3: Locate the Deceased Assets and Determine Their Value

What is the weight of “all of which this conveyance is made?”

The third step in claiming one’s inheritance is to locate the deceased’s assets and work to determine their value. You now know the authentic, credible version of my house’s history, and I’ve shared the connection, the claim, I have to my ghosts that allow me to serve as a legitimate executor. To practice the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance, I need to read between the lines of these archival documents and determine the value, the weight, of these assets and this inheritance that I’m left with. As the census records reveal, Lena and Alice are both listed as unemployed, or homemakers. Therefore, we can discern that there is a lack of opportunity for them, relegated instead to the work of the home, the work that continues to bring me so much joy as well as haunt me. Part of engaging in this subtly feminist act is not simply to lambast my house ghosts and I for the privileges we face, but to consider the small ways in which their resistance has opened a path for me. I hope to consider what Bratta and Powell have cautioned me to do—draw theoretical frameworks from my own contexts, in order to draw some important cultural touchstones. Drawing out the white, German, immigrant, feminized, oppressed nature of the opportunities of these women (as is made evident in the lack of acknowledgement in their technical documents), shows me their value, their struggle, the weight of this claim I’ve inherited. Obviously, the most clear claim I have to these women is the physical location of the home, which is after all the focus of this story. And as a part of this subtly feminist act, I need to use storied community listening to explore what the importance of being at home might do to my own shift in my practices and sense of self.

As I read through and seek out my home’s history, I glimpse subtly feminist rhetoric within the language of our home, and wonder if my ghosts faced the same. I’m getting hung up on making progress on this project because I’m constantly weighed down by the traditional duties I could imagine of Lena and Alice and Lydia and others who have labored on this land. An hour-long delay in getting started because my toddler needed to do everything herself this morning. Working in a coffee shop next to a daycare I have the privilege to send my kids to, because I have to pick the baby up early to diagnose what I know is another ear infection. Remembering in the middle of my research that I need to add applesauce to the grocery list, or that it’s time to change the laundry. In my current life, I struggle to juggle the cooking, the washing, the management of the household, and my family as a whole. But even in that struggle, I see a sort of honor in the work of the home, and the very act of honoring that work as a kind of subtle feminism.

Seeing the importance of this labor requires an attunement to the spatial rhetorical power of the home which, like women, has often been undervalued for the driving force it is. Enoch attends to the spatial rhetorics of the home, which she defines as “the multimodal ways through which spaces gain meaning. They are the material elements that create the space, as well as the pictorial, embodied, displayed, emotive, and discursive understandings that define what a space is and what it should be” (5). Her exploration of women’s relationship as they navigated space outside the home answers the call from scholars to view ma-

terial realities through the lens that we view written communication— power, context, and the ways in which our bodies change the space and give it meaning. I argue further that a focus on the work that (white, middle-class) women have done inside the home can exist in its own realm of spatial rhetorical power, its own subtly feminist act.

Though I am not the first-generation American that many of my house ghosts were, I work to instill our value system with my girls as their worlds expand and they learn to respond to them. Horst notes that early German immigrant women, likely around the time of Lydia and Lena, “had a central role as keeper of the house and caretaker of the family. She was to be servant to her husband, children, and the ethnic community which did not fail to glorify the woman as ‘Hausfrau’ (housewife), ‘Mutter,’ (mother), and ‘Jungfrau’ (young, woman, virgin)” (169). In this way, the German immigrant as housewife is seen as essential to the home, almost to the point of being patronized. I recognize that there is often a romanticizing that happens in this traditional image of (white, middle-class) women and the roles in which she can fulfill. And yet, at the risk of adding to the patronizing, it is this very work— the material elements that create a space— that built a foundation for future generations to advance, adjust, and contribute to the life in Cincinnati I now get to enjoy.

Shifting to the lens of spatial power is further legitimized when viewed through a historical context, particularly at the time that Alice Goertemiller and her husband would have been settling into the home I now share with their ghosts. Social politics shifted at the end of World War 1, as men returned home and needed to gain their posts and their power back by reasserting a women’s role in the home. This shift in role, and a reassertion from society to put women back in the home, can be seen in the rhetoric used in women’s magazines and manuals. Historian Ruth Cowan brings legitimacy to the power of this domestic work through a compelling narrative of household technologies, *More Work for Mothers*, that ultimately argues these technologies have created the domestic dynamics we are left with. Cowan writes that these handbooks suggested that “housework was to be thought of no longer as a core but, rather, an expression of the housewife’s personality and her affection for her family...” (177). She asserts that “We can also understand why these women continued to believe not just that their place was in their homes but that the work that they did there had enormous value. Small wonder then that these women, and their descendants, accepted the yoke of women’s work in the home and viewed the modern tools with which they did it as liberating, rather than oppressive, agents” (191). White, middle-class women like Alice and others who washed dishes and folded clothes in the same places I do now were socialized, through these rhetorical artifacts of not-so-subtle privilege, into revering their role as housewife. Such reverence continues in the guilt I feel for not taking all of my time to complete those tasks today. For despite my best efforts to split the load with my partner, I struggle heavily with (white, middle-class) guilt around “neglecting” some element of my not-so-spotless home, “outsourcing” my childcare to licensed professionals, and warming up leftovers instead of cooking a fresh meal each night.

It is true that this domestic work of maintaining a home is in fact part of the very evaluation of assets

that I must explore in claiming my inheritance. And it's also true that this work is part of a larger, more expansive look at the subtle ways in which we women of my home have ignored the larger issues of privilege, colonialism, and white-washing that remain part of my community today. By more deeply understanding the competing rhetorics of a kind of worship of housework at play, we can begin to understand where my house ghosts might have begun to gather a real and true sense of themselves in this labor. Listening to the glory in this labor, even though it is often romanticized, allows me to more deeply understand the way that this domestic labor is a kind of material rhetoric, and this honoring is itself a subtly feminist act. And so I am grateful to my ghosts. They reveal the sacredness in this work. But I am also haunted by my ghosts. They remain right on the edges of what and who I need to be.

Step 4: Pay Debts

To acknowledge the signing thereof: Can debts ever really be paid?

To fully claim one's inheritance, one must pay the debts of those that left the will in the first place. On paper, this is as simple as taking those assets, assessing their worth, and redistributing them for justice. In practice, I've authenticated my claim to my home, and my role as executor. I've assessed the weight of this claim, but I haven't yet redistributed the value of the claim for others to enjoy.

This special issue is all about addressing "who or what is feminist enough." As a privileged white woman, I constantly ask myself this question of "enough." I'm white, so am I doing enough to acknowledge my race? I'm middle-class, so am I doing enough to maximize and use my financial privileges? And the list goes on. By practicing my ever-evolving practice of storied community listening, I hope to embed myself in the community, through the very work of being at home, to work toward accepting the invitation toward action. And yet, as you might have read throughout this work, I am weighed down by the guilt of it all. In engaging with the feminist ethos that argues for equal access and consideration for all, I've seen many instances of the ways in which white femininity, often stereotyped as subdued or subtle in itself, gets priority over non-white voices. Part of this story, then, means sitting in the tension between technical communicator and storyteller, between oppressed and oppressor, between scholar and mother, between guilt and action. Framing these tensions, through this story, is my enactment of subtle feminism that allows me to claim my inheritance and engage, draw from, and change my behaviors and the legacy I choose to leave within and beyond this home.

By leaning into the heritage in this home— the German women, the whiteness, the privilege of living in a suburb, the privileges of having a home to keep— I believe I am practicing part of what it means to engage in the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance. Feminists, feminine people, feminist practices have all taught me the importance and the power of imagining a new way of thinking that isn't there (Hill Collins; Royster and Kirsch). So what if my way of listening is to lean into and honor the practices and the sacrifices that have been made in my very home? The way to prove this work matters is not through the

official histories, but in these quiet, lived moments. Not just in my literal home but in the domestic labor and sacrifice that have shaped my space as an educator and scholar. It is critical to honor the ephemeral motions and labor that I go through every day. I can't (and, if I'm honest, don't want to) change my social standing or the privileges I have been afforded. And yet guilt is about as unproductive of an emotion as there is. So I am working to vulnerably explore what it might mean to resist social location, or perhaps to press back against the historical weight it is clear I have been given.

Even as I honor those, however, I want to lean into the hauntings of this honor, this privilege to be in this home. In the most recent *Octalog*, Donnie Johnson Sackey asks us, "What correctives or calls for justice emerge from our research and telling of spatial histories? And what are our roles as researchers and teachers in supporting the work of spatial justice?" (329) In seeking to answer this question, I find my role as a researcher is to be myself—a feminist woman, a privileged mother, a white privileged homeowner—to listen to the subtly feminist rhetoric of this unassuming space—one home in one city in our region—and use story and personal reflection in order to move closer to justice. This act, then, is how I practice a kind of subtle feminism, a subversion of the inheritance that is so subtle one might not even notice their own responsibility within it.



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