

# **Anthropology Project #1 Map of a Block**

Students often find this assignment childish and unproductive while they are doing it and recognize its value only when engaged in later more complex fieldwork. Two morals: The first is that the assignment, like spinach or lima beans, is good for you; the second is that you can make it intrinsically interesting by selecting a block that has compelling features of architecture, layout, or spacing.

You may also object that you are learning far more than you (or I) care to know about the geography, the aesthetics, and the social nature of the place where you temporarily live. The intent is not to teach you about the town you live in, but to learn that ethnographic work is always located in time and place--the geographic parallel to Clifford Geertz's statement "I was there because you were there." It also brings into account the holistic practice of anthropology. You must consider everything when you are out in the field. All of your own work must be at least as concretely located its own time, place, and social situation as the blocks described here.

## **PURPOSE**

This first bit of fieldwork is conceptually and procedurally easy, so you can proceed from small successes through larger ones. But the ease is deceptive because it requires you to observe closely and to see the familiar as if it were unfamiliar. Stepping away from the usual or stripping away your preconceptions is not easy.

This assignment will help you experience a fundamental of ethnographic fieldwork: It is concrete as to time and to place and describes the relation between sociocultural behavior and physical environment. In subsequent assignments, what you have learned in this one becomes "the setting," which must always be given its due.

## **PROCEDURE**

Find an interesting block. Find a block that is not merely convenient to you, but one with something (building, landscaping, arrangement of features) sufficiently arresting to be worth rising out of the torpor (dullness) customary for performing some classroom assignments. The block you choose does not have to be in Deerfield. It can be in Madison, Cambridge, wherever you can spend some time observing.

The block may be defined either as a chunk of land bounded on four sides by streets, or as the two facing sides of one block of a single street plus the side street back to the alley (if any) on either side. *Without interviewing the people you encounter*, describe that block building by building, lot by lot. Don't neglect the alley. Draw a map of the block and annotate it. *Detail, detail, detail*, but explain why the details you choose are worth noting.

Visit the block at least two different times of the day, to see how use differs. Some blocks change their character drastically from morning to evening, weekday to weekend.

## PITFALLS TO AVOID

1. Do your best to describe without judging: "A warm inviting house," "pretty lawn chair," "ugly fence," "beautiful view," "cute child," "middleclass couple" (very few American adults describe themselves as anything other than "middle class"), "older car" (older than God? older than your father's Oldsmobile?), "pricey jewelry" (compared to what?). Above all, avoid the easy, meaningless adjective "nice." The trick is to go to the trouble of asking yourself what it is that makes the house inviting, the woman pretty or the man handsome, and so forth. Then, having done so, it is not only legitimate but compelling to say (in your own words) "on the basis of the foregoing description, I infer that the occupants must be wealthy," or the car student owned, or whatever it may be. You will find that acquiring skill in the game of avoiding judgment is surprisingly difficult. If you succeed, you will be practicing cultural relativism. (Try to avoid Ethnocentrism)
2. Nostalgia. This exercise is to sharpen your eyes, not your memory. Don't describe a block you already know well. "I lived in this house for ten years. Across the street were Uncle Harry and Aunt Min, and the cousins played in all of the backyards" is a pleasant reminiscence that has nothing to do with the purpose of the map of a block. Use one sense organ only- your eye- and use it as sharply as you can. Pick a block on the other side of town, or in an area you have not paid that much attention to.

## FURTHER IN THE SAME DIRECTION

This first assignment was conceived to get you started almost painlessly in the adventure of field ethnography and to make the point that human events happen in particular places, weathers, times, and so forth. If you are intrigued, you will be please to know that what you are doing is a subdiscipline of anthropology called *cultural ecology*. Human interaction with the environment provides one of the best invitations to interdisciplinary work that anthropology offers.

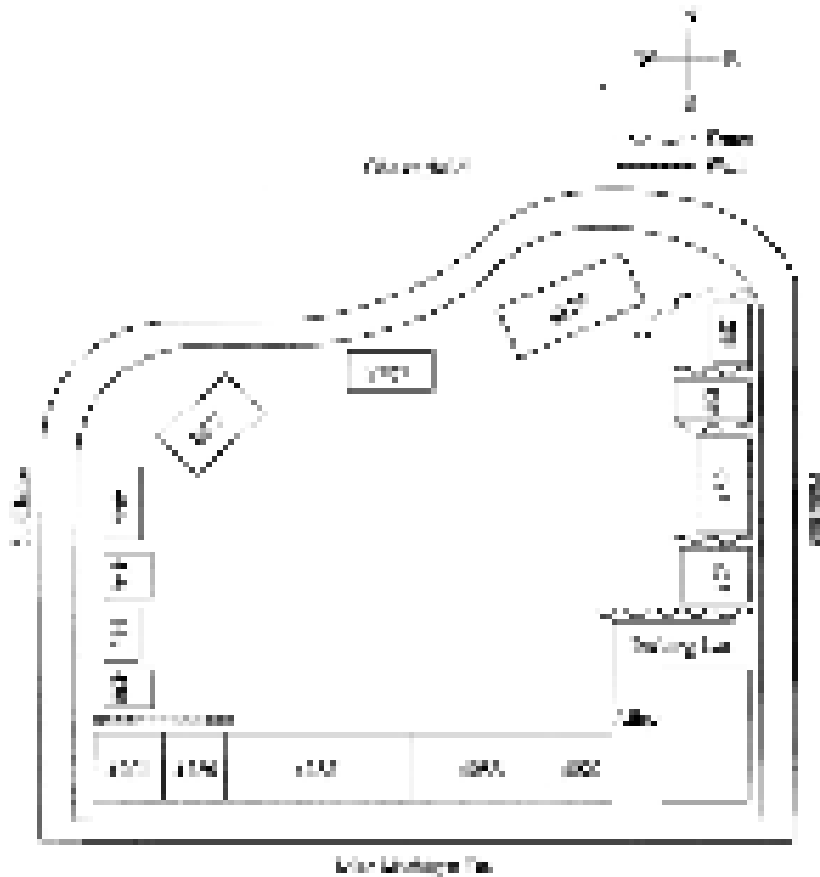
**THIS PROJECT IS DUE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19<sup>TH</sup> BY 3:15PM**

# A Changing Block in Standale

by Jane Doe

*This paper is a model of how to describe. It is thorough, the block chosen is interesting because its uses are changing, and the author explains how she reached her conclusions. Note "the mailbox ... made my think the building was older ...," "weeds are growing... indicating the building may not be as new as it looks," and "One young girl. . . . By younger I mean less than 25 but older than 16. " We cannot stress too much the importance of describing concretely and leading the reader through your process of deduction.*

*As a caution to readers, one flaw in writing style has been left uncorrected: overuse of "there is. . . ." Note how that phrase slows down the flow of sentences and decreases the reader's interest.*



## **TIME OF DAY, 11:30-12:45**

The block I chose is 8 miles east of Grand Valley State University on M-45 in Standale, Michigan. The block is surrounded on the south by Lake Michigan Dr., on the east by Parkside, on the north by Chesterfield, and on the west by St. Clair.

## LAKE MICHIGAN DRIVE

4291--Standale Trading Company. One-story orange-red brick building in the style of a house. The roof is shaped like a pyramid and not flat like most buildings one sees in a city. There is a red wooden door frame and the address is painted on a sign above the door. This stood out because it seemed to add to the hominess of the building. The owners of the building appeared quite patriotic: There is an American flag hanging from the building and a flag draped across the inside of the window. A woman who looked to be in her 50s entered the store. She was wearing polyester pants and a blouse with a bow that tied around the neck. She drove a 1980s-model brick red Buick.

4289--The Cottage Pop Shop. This building shares a roof with the former building (4291). The roof looks fairly new as if it was redone to accommodate the business. The brick is of a slightly darker shade of red than 4291. It also has the same style door frame as 4291, but this one is white rather than red. There are a few green plants in the window, along with some woven baskets reflecting the cottage atmosphere being portrayed. On the outside of the building was an older style of mailbox. It was in the shape of a rectangle standing on its short end. This made me think the building was at least older than some of the others it was adjacent to.

4285--Creative Upholstery. One story white/coral brick building. This color scheme is seemingly more modern than the red brick of the building to the left. The building is square with a flat roof. There are two large windows separated by glass doors. One window reveals a bedroom set with a mirror behind. The bedspread contained a floral pattern with a shell-like headboard. This also made the building seem modern in comparison to the building to its left. Also in this room was a floral fabric chair, a brass lamp, and some old, unupholstered pillows on the right side of the room. Through the right window one could see the shop where the upholstery is done. The condition of the shop suggested that it is fairly new, while the sign out front contained just a metal rim, with no sign in it.

4283--Pearson-Cook Realtors. One-story brown brick building. The paneling and wood on the building appear new. There are no chips in it or weather-worn stains like the other adjacent buildings. I'm not sure what used to be here, but the sidewalk in front of the building is cracked in different places and weeds are growing out of the cracks indicating the building may not be as new as it looks. A man in a suit and tie walked out of the building and got in a clean white Grand Prix. This was a different clientele than was seen going into the Standale Trading Co.

4279--Standale Coin Laundry. The building is shared with the realtors mentioned above so the description is the same as far as the building goes. This laundromat is larger than the one that used to be across the street. I don't believe this one is opened yet for there were no lights on inside the building. The fact that the laundromat has expanded points to the fact that the town itself is growing. Perhaps it is growing because of students or beginning families who don't own washers and dryers.

Alley--Just gravel, with a big pothole probably from the delivery trucks which pass through it to deliver to the restaurant.

Johnny Notos Italian Ristorante--Brown brick building with patio out front. Newer looking brown roof. Truck loading in food to the restaurant. Few cars in the lot out front. Two business people walking into restaurant. Each wore a gray suit.

## **PARKSIDE**

427--Two-story house with cream siding. Cement steps leading up to front door of the house look older than the rest of the house. Black railing on steps is loose and hanging on the left side. The paint is chipping on the bottom of the rim of the door. There is a red brick chimney attached to the side of the house. It obviously doesn't match the cream siding. This is a good indication that this siding is an addition to the house. There is an old white shed in the back whose paint is chipping and whose boards are loose. There are some summer chairs in the back of the house that don't coordinate with one another. The lawn is not well kept, meaning that it is quite long with several weeds throughout. There are lots of trees in the yard. There was a black Amigo in the drive and a gray Mustang with a broken left tail light. From the condition of the lawn and the cars in the drive, I assume the people living here are students or have an unstable income.

439--Rather large house (compared with the majority of them on the block) with gray siding. The siding looks new. The address is in brass letters. There is a gray roof darker than the siding with a matching brick to accent the siding. There is a pink door near the larger-than-two-car garage. A privacy fence surrounds the backyard. The lawn is cut closely and upon it sits a "welcome goose." Because of the crisp and clean appearance of the entire house, it appears to be new.

451--Two-story creamy yellow house. This house is small compared to the other three on the block. The cement step leading to the house is neat, but has a chip on the top step. The lawn and landscaping seem well groomed. There seems to be someone who stays at home living in this house, since the landscaping is kept up so well. The flowers don't have leaves stuck in their bed. There are two matching flower pots on the porch. There is a large greenish purple tree in the yard and a smaller tree on the right surrounded by flowers. A flower wreath is hung on the door. A Ford truck sits in the drive with supplies sticking out the back.

457--Ranch-style home with white siding and red brick in the front. Country blue shutters envelop the windows. The privacy fence is of a few different colors: gray, country blue, and brick red. The lawn is well kept with shrubs scattered throughout, but not as many flowers are contained in this landscape as at 451. There is a scene of a deer in the woods on the mailbox. This makes me think the person(s) living here like to hunt.

## CHESTERFIELD

4238--Ranch-style home larger than most on Parkside. Gray siding with gray shutters. Steps are made of cement, but no cracks. The style of the door looks older than the outside of the house. Perhaps the house has been newly redone and the door has been left for a later time. The lawn is extremely green and different kinds of shrubs surround the house with tall purple flowers. The garage is closed and no cars are outside.

424--This ranch looks much older than the other houses on the street because of its color scheme. The colors look as if they were chosen in the 1970s. The brick is light brown with yellow tint. The front door is a chocolate brown with dark yellow squares placed vertically down the center. The one car garage is also a chocolate brown with dark yellow diamonds on it. There are two huge pine trees in the front yard. They appear to be several years old due to the fact that they are about 25 feet tall. There is a huge tree on the right side of the lawn providing shade for most of the lawn. It appears the occupants of this home like privacy. When looking at the house straight on, all one can see is the front door and part of the window on the right.

4252--Large yellow ranch home. Wooden garage is painted yellow with white squares. Two 1980s-model Chrysler and Plymouth minivans were in the drive. The steps are weathered while the lawn is well kept. Some dead cut grass is lying in it.

## ST. CLAIR

464--This yellow ranch is on the long side. The shutters are black. There are purple flowers hanging from the lamppost. It appears as if a family lives here. There is a basketball net on the roof. A rusty dark blue Tempo was parked in the street along with a blue truck. A stone deer sits on the wellkept lawn.

456--A stout dark brown brick home. Beige garage and beige siding. Clean steps with a cut lawn. No cars in the drive.

448--Gray ranch recently (last 10 yrs.) remodeled. New garage. Two bay windows, one large and one small. Well-kept lawn. Two older cars in drive, rusting, along with a new model Jeep Cherokee.

430--Two-story home. Brown brick with cream siding and brick-red shutters. Country style. Flowers in barrels. Green heart wreath on door. The wooden garage looks like an addition because the material doesn't flow with the brick house. Wooden privacy fence. Several large trees in yard including five tall pine trees. Recycling container in the drive. A brick-colored Buick was parked in front of the house.

## TIME OF DAY

Wed. 11:05-11:55 A.M. This is a very busy time on Lake Michigan Dr. It was a warm sunny day. Two women could be seen pushing young children in strollers. Both women were dressed simply in T-shirts and either jeans or shorts. A young girl (14-17) was seen riding a three-speed bicycle down Lake Mich. Dr. There were a few cars in the parking lot. Around 11:20 a.m., activity seemed to pick up in front of the Standale Trading Post. Two rather worn cars pulled up. The first car was a rusty orange car. It was a 1970s model and the driver of the car appeared gruff looking with a dark beard and curly brown 1970s-style hair. The next car that came was a 19130s-model Ford that was quite dirty. The owner may live out in the country and have to drive daily on dirt roads. Even in this small section of businesses there appeared a range of clientele, from country looking to suit and tie. This shows that Standale isn't at a standstill, Businesses are moving in, yet there are many farmers and blue-collar workers in the area,

Wed. 6:55-7:10 P.M. During this time the lights were out in the upholstery shop and the cottage shop. Parked in front of the Trading Co. were a newer model truck (1990s), a new sporty green Honda Civic, and a mobile traveler. The realtor was open and a few cars were parked in the front. At Johnny Notos there was a full parking lot. Many different style cars occupied the lot but almost all were made since 1980. The back door was open, revealing the kitchen inside. A few kids rode through the parking lot on bikes. One young was walking by. By younger I mean less than 25 but older than 16. She appeared to be a student. She was carrying a Mexican-style bag, wore baggy jeans, with a more fitting shirt and had her hair in a bun. Several of the houses had additional cars parked in the driveway or the street. Front doors were opened in a few of the houses. To my delight the houses on St. Clair had Avon bags hanging from their mailboxes. I'm assuming women live in those houses. Obviously, these people are gone during the day, probably working 9-5.

**Conclusion:** The street has definitely changed throughout the years as indicated by the buildings on Lake Michigan Drive. What used to perhaps be residential is now expanding into businesses. The area is also building up residentially as indicated by the expanding laundromat. The neighborhood appears to be middle class. There is time to keep up a lawn and money to redo a house in the future, I see Standale growing as a business community and continuing to grow residentially as well. It seems like a place people can move to who are just starting out. With the nearby communities growing as they are, Standale could become increasingly populated.

# In the Cracks

by 

*Although, the purpose of this first assignment is to improve your eye, to record accurately what you see, there is no rule against seeing with, a poetic eye, as this author does in describing a block that seems to have fallen into the cracks.*

Walking was really the only way I know how to get to the block I studied. It is bounded by the railroad tracks, the creek, and two overpasses --walking to get there somehow fit.

I had first seen this block when I was driving through town, and the block fascinated me. It seemed to have fallen into a crack and taken root. This crack appeared as a crack in the context of the city. The context that most of us are used to is that of the car. A place in a city is someplace you can drive to by car. Roads and cars constitute our framework of understanding space in the city. We are baffled when someone on foot walks under an overpass and disappears. Where did they go? There are no roads there! Hence, the implication that because you don't drive there, there really is nothing--merely a crack.

This is where I found the block. Of course you can drive there, but it really seems to belong more to the world of walking. The spatial context is that of a person on foot. This is because the block has fallen between the two overpasses where Colorado and Cimarron cross Monument Creek and the railroad tracks. There is much greater access to this area on foot. In the context of roads and cars there is only one entrance and in a car you cannot travel to many parts of this area. On foot, a much greater integration with the surrounding area and city is possible. You can walk onto either overpass, down into the creek bed, and across the railroad yard to get to the rest of the city. Thus, I find it easier to place this area within the contextual framework of a person on foot than the contextual framework of roads and cars. In the world of road and cars, this place is in a crack. Enough reflexive contemplation. A more objective look at the composition of this area follows:

1. General contractor - This lot consists of a building and a chain-link enclosure topped with barbed wire. Architecturally speaking, the building is a typical American rectangular block topped with a sloped roof. The facing is stucco. In front of the building are low evergreen bushes. The windows are barred. The materials within the enclosure are neatly arranged. These materials consist, among other things, of a handful of old travel trailers and some dressed logs. There are also two piles of dressed logs outside.

2. Private residence - This building is a very nondescript house built in the "rectangular block" style. The siding is typical wood siding that used to be green but is now quite weather beaten. There is a waist-high chain-link fence in front and, 2 feet behind that, a 6-foot privacy fence that conceals most of the house.

3. "Sales" - This cinder-block building is very squared off, with a flat roof, but it is not just one rectangle. It is painted green with big black letters on the front A.P. HARLEY SALES. The primary commodity dealt with seems to be tires. There are tires, among other



things, piled in the fenced-in barbed wire enclosure around the building. There are also some old gas pumps. Like the general contractor enclosure, this one has shrubbery in front, barred windows, and a general neatness.

4. Private residence - This is a rectangular box, slope-roofed house that is quite weather-beaten. The old sedan parked out front has mud tires in back. The backyard resembles a junkyard with the main constituent being piles of wood.

5. Empty lot - The sign says NO DUMPING OR TRESPASSING and this rule seems to have been followed. This is a well-cared-for vacant lot. On the front edge of the lot is parked an International pickup in excellent shape and a trailer. This vacant lot is across from the first four buildings.

6. Susie Perkins cottages/apts. for rent - This is a lot entirely composed of various houses. At one end are several identical bungalow cottage type buildings quite close together. Toward the other end, the bungalows become less similar and are arranged in a different pattern. The final building is a two-story house with some windows boarded up in pale green plywood. A high cinderblock fence connected to two buildings creates a courtyard that is somehow part of all the other buildings in the lot. There is an old picket fence around the whole shebang. The cars parked out front are all large, old, and American.

7. Private residence - This is a brown stucco house in excellent repair. The yard is filled with various types of junk all of which are useful and in good repair (e.g., fairly new tires and a stack of firewood covered with a tarp). There are four cars parked out front, all of which are fairly new (within ten years). There are two foreign pickups (the only foreign cars on the block). There are four dogs in the yard as well.

8. Church - This church was built in the style of a Catholic mission, but quite recently and very stylized. All of the elements that are supposed to be there are, but the building is obviously a copy. It is labeled simply "Chadbourne." The windows are lead stained glass covered with screens, and there is a recent construction on the back that hasn't been painted, although the stucco has been applied.

My visit was in the late afternoon on a Sunday and I saw three groups of Chicanos-one group of females and two of males-on foot walking along the roads. They all appeared to be under 30. One truck did arrive at the brown stucco house. In it were two middle-aged white males dressed in work clothes and carrying a lunch cooler. Otherwise, there were a couple of cars driving along the road. The clothing of those people that I did see indicated a blue-collar, working-class lifestyle.

The only speculation I have as to the development of the neighborhood is that the businesses might be family businesses owned by people who live nearby. The residences and businesses both were clearly built for the purposes they are being used for, and none look like they were built in the last twenty years. The vacant lot might indicate future development.

Unless more roads are built, however, this will continue to be a block in the cracks of the road and car context of the city.