

# Mapping *Candide*'s El Dorado in 21st-century Los Angeles

“What sort of a country then is this,” said they to one another; “a country unknown to all the rest of the world, and where nature is of a kind so different from ours?”

- Voltaire, *Candide* (1759)

## I. Arriving in El Dorado: “All Men are Free”

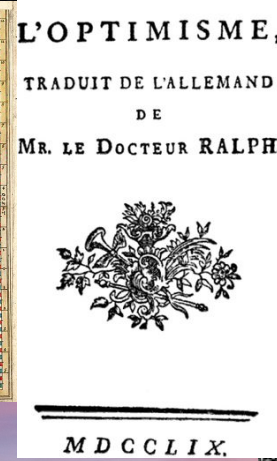
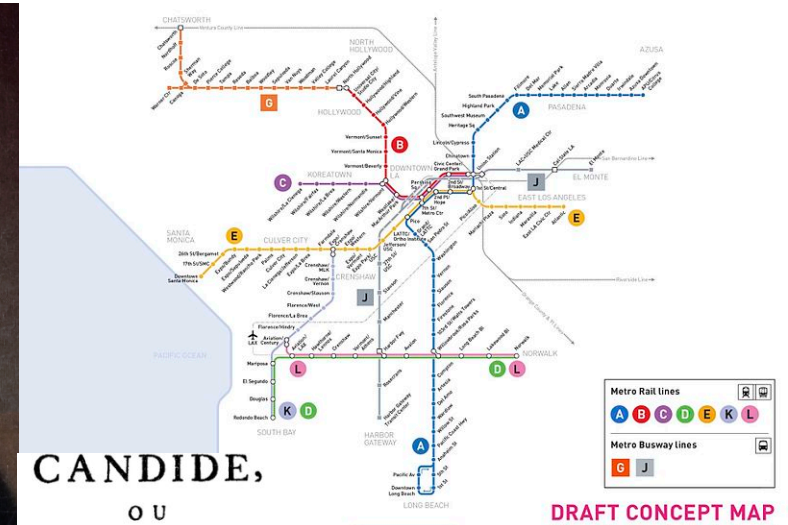
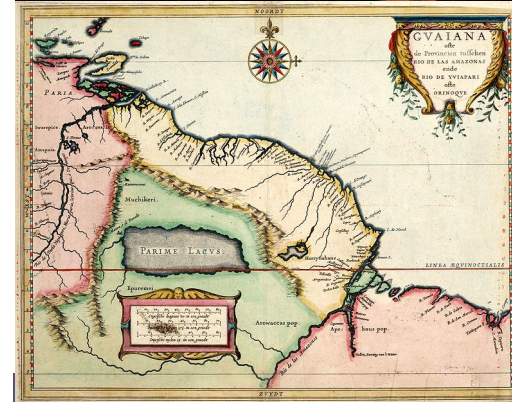
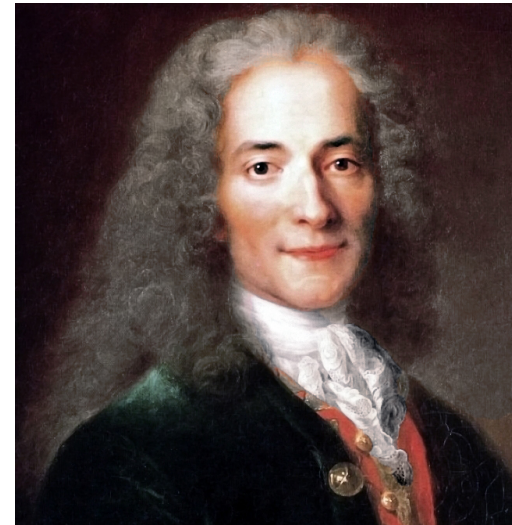
In Chapters 17 and 18 of Voltaire’s satirical novel *Candide* (1759), Candide and his servant Cacambo arrive in the mythical El Dorado, a secluded South American region of astounding riches. The two men marvel at the precious gems lying on the ground and the common people dressed in golden robes. When they enter the capital of El Dorado they are impressed by the splendor of the city. The social injustices of religious discrimination and poverty that Candide and Cacambo encounter in other parts of the globe, specifically Europe, are not apparent in El Dorado. Moreover, there are schools, but no prisons in the capital city. In El Dorado, “All men are free.”

## II. Leaving El Dorado: “We Shall Be Richer Than All the Kings in Europe”

Despite all the riches and freedoms found in El Dorado, Candide and Cacambo leave the country because the focus on equality means that they “shall only be upon a footing with the rest, whereas, if [they] return to [their] old world,” with gold and gems from El Dorado, they “shall be richer than all the kings in Europe.” Candide and Cacambo “quit the country” because they want the social status and power (they believe) they will acquire in Europe as wealthy men.

## III. Imagining Voltaire’s *Candide* in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Los Angeles

In many ways, Voltaire’s description of El Dorado satirizes the economic greed of colonial conquest and the political and social hierarchies of the Age of Enlightenment. Imagine if Voltaire were alive today and living in Los Angeles. What social injustices would he satirize? What would his description of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century El Dorado consist of? How might we better understand social injustices today by mapping *Candide*'s El Dorado against the background of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Los Angeles?





# How might we better understand and take action against social injustices today by mapping *Candide*'s El Dorado against the background of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Los Angeles?

## IV. El Dorado Unit - 10<sup>th</sup>-Grade English Class on Voltaire's *Candide*

For this three-week unit, students will imaginatively map the capital city of El Dorado as a way to creatively explore a speculative future for Los Angeles. Drawing on their reading of *Candide*, as well as class discussions and cognitive mapping activities, students will 1) individually create a cognitive map of Los Angeles, 2) collaboratively create, in groups of 2-3 students, a map of *Candide*'s El Dorado, and 3) collectively, as a class, create a "social justice" StoryMap of 21st-century Los Angeles.

## V. Creating a Cognitive Map of Los Angeles

In week 1, students will create a cognitive map focusing on the five cognitive mapping elements from Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960): paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Student will present their maps in class and discuss similarities and differences in the maps. Finally, students will write a short reflection on what they have learned about themselves, their classmates, and the city of LA.

## VI. Mapping *Candide*'s El Dorado

In week 2, after discussing and analyzing passages from *Candide*, students will collaboratively create a map of the capital city of El Dorado. In constructing their maps, students are encouraged to use their knowledge of Lynch's cognitive mapping elements, but also to consider the limitations of that framework. At the end of the week, students will submit an essay in response to the question: "If Voltaire were alive today and living in Los Angeles, what social injustices would he satirize and how might he depict a 21<sup>st</sup>-century El Dorado?"

## VII. A Social Justice StoryMap of Los Angeles

In week 3, students are assigned tasks, based on their interests, to help the class collectively produce a first draft of a "social justice" StoryMap based on the following theme: "Mapping *Candide*'s El Dorado in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Los Angeles." The following week students will receive a "crit," feedback on their work from students and educators outside of the course. In response to feedback, students will revise the StoryMap. At the end of the course, students will present their work at a publication party for the school community.

