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"Cities too busy to hate": Economic development through a diversity ideology lens

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ABSTRACT

As economic inequality among racial and ethnic groups persists, debate continues about the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as guiding values to promote equitable economic growth and development. This project uses diversity ideology as a framework to examine how proposals for Amazon's second headquarters (HQ2) reflect applicants' beliefs and value systems around racial and ethnic diversity, equity, and inclusion. In our sample of 70 proposals, respondents layered four primary tactics: disregard, limited engagement, acknowledgment without culpability, and value claiming. Prominent approaches included avoidance of any discussion of diversity, objectification of racial and ethnic minority populations as an economic or cultural input, and the assertion a racially and ethnically diversity workforce is an attainable goal while utilizing stereotypes. Each of these approaches reflects different ways racial and ethnic minority populations remain marginalized within economic development proposals, even when firms actively solicit information on their presence and support.

KEYWORDS

Economic development; place branding; diversity ideology; workforce diversity; economic inequality

Introduction

In metropolitan economies across the U.S., a substantial and widening racial wealth gap burdens Black and Hispanic individuals, families, and communities (Bhutta et al., 2020; Ganong & Shoag, 2017). Local stakeholders often portray economic growth as a panacea that will alleviate inequalities, address social problems, and provide widespread opportunity—justifying business attraction strategies instead of investments in communities (Kantor et al., 1997; Peterson, 1981). The firm recruitment process, however, lacks transparency and the portrayal of marginalized populations is unclear despite claims that new workforce opportunities will benefit the communities most affected by structural inequality.

In 2017, Amazon released a request for proposals (RFP) for its new second headquarters. They received 238 responses from entities such as municipal and state governments, chambers of commerce, and business alliances who each justified why their jurisdiction was an ideal location for Amazon's HQ2, its estimated $5 billion investment, and the approximately 50,000 jobs with an average salary of $100,000. The RFP outlines Amazon's preferences and criteria, such as a population of over 1 million people; a downtown project site; a suitable labor force; fiber internet infrastructure; a stable business climate; and transportation connectivity. Additionally, the RFP lists "Cultural Community Fit" as one of eight key decision drivers. Within this category, Amazon states it values the "presence and support of a diverse population." The RFP, however, does not elaborate on its definition of "a diverse population" or give indications of how cities might respond to the prompt. Without guidance on how to respond to this element, competition for Amazon's HQ2 presents an opportunity to observe how economic development stakeholders define and portray diversity in their firm recruitment.

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Our analysis focuses on how diversity, specifically racial and ethnic diversity, is characterized in firm recruitment. Specifically, we used diversity ideology as a framework to content analyze how 70 proposals for Amazon's second headquarters (HQ2) reflect applicants' beliefs and value systems about racial and ethnic diversity, equity, and inclusion. The following questions motivate our research: (1) what conceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion appear within this sample of proposals and (2) how prevalent are these ideologies?

We found many proposals describe their area as "diverse" without identifying what characteristics contributed to diversity. Other proposals focused on how racial and ethnic minority groups could contribute to the quality of life of future Amazon employees. Populations born outside of the U.S. were more often described as workforce assets who would bring talent to Amazon and provide a competitive business advantage, while discussions about future employment opportunities at Amazon often excluded U.S.-born Black and Hispanic populations.

The following section begins with a discussion of place branding, a firm recruitment strategy emphasizing marketing, to explore how external communication can reflect a jurisdiction's values, beliefs, and norms. We then outline economic development strategies focused on diversity, equity and inclusion, which helped tailor the diversity ideology framework used in our analysis. Subsequent sections detail the methods used for our content analysis, present findings across nine code groups, and discuss how the type and prevalence of different diversity ideologies create barriers and opportunities for racial and ethnic minority groups.

Place-branding and economic inequality

Whether a jurisdiction navigates the uncertainty and competition of the economic landscape with traditional strategies that emphasize tax incentives and subsidies or uses an array of overlapping, nonexclusive strategies such as educational and infrastructure improvement, government support, or tailored interventions to build cluster and networks, self-promotion is at the core (Glasmeier, 2000; Lowe, 2011). Place branding represents a widely used economic growth strategy aimed at attracting external capital through the creation and maintenance of the narrative and reputation attached to a jurisdiction (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013; Johansson, 2012). Creating a brand can help the jurisdiction understand its "product" meaning it must account for its strengths and effectively communicate the benefits of locating within its boundaries (Cleave et al., 2017a). It can also represent a "fast" policy where economic development stakeholders focus on superficial actions rather than building social and physical infrastructure (Cleave et al., 2017b). Regardless of whether a proposal uses place branding to reflect substantive or superficial economic development policy, it reflects how a jurisdiction seeks to present itself to an external audience.

Place branding does not, however, require a focus on equity or redressing structural inequality. Hanley and Douglass note, "Efforts to promote innovation, entrepreneurialism, and creative industries are almost universally hailed as class- and value-neutral, when in fact the cost effectiveness and distributional consequences of such policies are unclear" (Hanley & Douglass, 2014, p. 288). As a result, these efforts can reinforce the status quo and result in negative consequences for residents marginalized within the current system. Creative class strategies typify the challenge of creating brands that appeal to external audiences without placing equity at the forefront. Florida (2002) instructs cities to pursue three Ts (technology, talent, and tolerance) and highlight foreign-born populations as contributing to economic growth in knowledge sectors. However, the relationship between creative class concentration and economic growth remains unclear (see Donegan et al., 2008; Glaeser, 2005; McGranahan & Wojan, 2007). Further, creative class attraction strategies mobilize resources for a privileged class of people (i.e., "creatives") by constructing of spaces of consumption while neglecting existing socioeconomic inequality, normalizing forms of gentrification and maintaining the abundance of low-wage work (Peck, 2005). These policies can actively reinforce racialized divisions of labor and ignore immigrant exclusion and discrimination in the labor market (Leslie & Catungal, 2012).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion within economic development

Too often, the marginalization of low-skilled workers is an acceptable price to pay for high-skilled jobs and equity remains an objective to be pursued only after growth is achieved (Fainstein, 2001; Zhang et al., 2017). Prosperous regions do not transition away from pro-growth business attraction strategies (Lowe, 2007; Morgan et al., 2019; Stokan et al., 2021) and Black and Hispanic workers are more likely to be paid poverty-level wages when compared to white workers (Economic Policy Institute, 2018). Between 2000–2018, none of the almost 200 metropolitan areas that house 80% of the U.S. population consistently reduced gaps by income, race, and place (Liu et al., 2020).

As economic development policies fail to alter entrenched economic inequality along racial and ethnic lines, some jurisdictions center diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as guiding values to promote equitable development and equal opportunity. There is heterogeneity in DEI efforts within economic development practice and incomplete information about whether these efforts result in more equitable outcomes. Initially, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts to address economic inequality focused on individual firms. The acknowledgment that mainstream market participation systematically excludes low-income and racial/ethnic minority communities, led to the promotion of "inclusive businesses" as a strategy to integrate marginalized populations into existing business networks (Likoko & Kini, 2017). A racially and ethnically diverse workforce broadens a firm's knowledge and decision-making capabilities, which can inform adjustment and extend product and service offerings to new markets (Thomas & Ely, 1996). However, the presence of racially/ethnically diverse populations is not equivalent to integration into firm operations and management, authority in decision-making, and opportunities to rise organizational ranks (Jordan, 2011; Roberson, 2006). Critiques of DEI efforts in economic development include corporate co-option, a lack of structural focus, and the motivation to fulfill a directive rather than genuine incorporation of diversity, equity, and inclusion into firm and city operations (Embrick, 2011).

Current discourses seek to integrate equity into economic development by extending their attention outside of individual firms, setting explicit goals, and expanding the targets of economic development beyond traditional firm recruitment. Social entrepreneurship, when organizations and jurisdictions encourage economic inclusivity by aiding entrepreneurial opportunities in nonprofit or for-profit ventures with social aims with a focus on marginalized populations, is an emerging strategy to build networks and provide resources (Baumüller et al., 2014). Equity advocates argue for growth goals alongside objectives, such as lessening inequality, creating employment opportunities and pathways to the middle class for current residents, and fostering innovation (Goetz et al., 2011; Lowe & Feldman, 2017; Parilla & Liu, 2018; Partridge & Rickman, 2003). Procedural justice through the inclusion of a broader cross-section of stakeholders may contribute to more local government action on social equity (Liao et al., 2019; Svara et al., 2015) and applying human development theory to economic development may result in more distributive justice, as competition with neighboring jurisdictions is replaced by local investment in social and physical infrastructure (Doussard & Yenigun, 2022). Our application of diversity ideology offers a diagnostic tool to explore the explicit usage of racial and ethnic diversity in economic development policy.

Diversity ideology

Diversity ideology focuses on how conceptions of diversity, inclusion, and associated practices can reinforce status quo conditions and power dynamics between racial and ethnic groups. Smith and Mayorga-Gallo (2017) argue current belief systems prioritize symbolic representation efforts and ignore policy responses to entrenched systemic inequalities, and identify four tenants of diversity ideology: acceptance, commodity, intent, and liability. Although the U.S. is becoming more race conscious, the emphasis on representation allows whites to associate their diversity aims with equality and justice without taking action to eradicate inequalities (Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017). Mayorga-Gallo (2019) further asserts these four tenets co-opt race consciousness to center white attitudes and

desires and the perpetuation of these discourses not only maintains the status quo, but actively promotes structural racial inequality.

Corporate diversity and inclusion initiatives are widely perceived as signaling strategies to attract diverse talent and communicate an organization's support for equality of opportunity (Jonsen et al., 2016). Embrick (2011) examined the use of diversity ideology by upper-level managers in Fortune 1000 companies and found managers adopted broad definitions of diversity to encompass many groups and attributes, which diverted attention from the types of diversity associated with workplace inequalities, such as race and gender. Despite leadership claims to value and promote success among racially and ethnically diverse workers, there is little evidence to support equal opportunities in the workplace.

Within education, Arce-Trigatti and Anderson (2018) analyzed speeches on education reform and identify two prominent discourses: diversity as economic input and diversity as democratic input. Diversity as economic input argues diversity enhances cultural capital, leading to greater ideas, innovations, and collaboration amongst nations, which heightened economic competitiveness in the global economy. Diversity as a democratic input promotes diversity of ideas and collaborations to facilitate more balanced decision-making that contributed to enhanced equity for diverse and often disadvantaged populations. This conceptualization acknowledges achievement and opportunity gaps based on different backgrounds and characteristics of individuals and posits promoting diversity of ideas in a collaborative environment to address systemic injustices. Iverson (2007) examines how universities articulate commitments to cultivate inclusive and equitable environments. The analysis of diversity actions plans from 20 U.S. land-grant universities identified four prominent discourses: access, disadvantage, marketplace, and democracy. These discourses center whiteness and frame people of color both as disadvantaged outsiders and key contributors to a desired environment of diverse thought. Historic inequalities and disadvantages of certain populations are sometimes acknowledged and creating diverse and inclusive environments are presented as a democratic duty to promote fair equality of opportunity.

Materials and methods

Amazon announced the request for proposals for a second North America headquarters on September 17, 2017. By the deadline of October 20, 2017, Amazon received 238 proposals from across North America (Dastin, 2017). Some applicants released their proposals to the public, but the majority became available following Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Submissions made by private entities such as chambers of commerce are not subject to FOIA requests and are likely underrepresented in our analysis. We obtained 81 proposals from North American applicants on Muckrock.com (MuckRock, n.d.) with three additional proposals obtained through professional networks.

We limited our sample to U.S. applicants, which contained 76 proposals, spanning 26 states. We used six proposals from the sample to create and test the protocol. While the RFP's guidance around population size could bias applications toward large, urbanized locales, applications representing states, counties, metropolitan areas, municipalities, and small communities and suburbs were received. Proposals vary significantly in length and sophistication, ranging from less than 20-page applications created using word processing software to professionally produced documents of over 300 pages. A table of demographic data (total population, percentage of the population by race/ethnicity, percentage of the population who is foreign born, household median income, and poverty rate) appears in the supplementary resources. The table uses the geographic designation most aligned with the boundaries described in the proposal, and the successful Northern Virginia proposal appears at the top of the table to facilitate comparisons.

Protocol creation

We created a coding instrument based on typologies of diversity ideology. From Smith and Mayorga-Gallo (2017), we included code groups for *Liability, Acceptance, Commodity*, and *Intent*. Code groups for *Access, Democracy or Fairness* and *Liberation* were added based on the work of Iverson (2007) and Arce-Trigatti and Anderson (2018). The work of Embrick (2011) helped adapt these typologies to economic development. We created sub-codes based on the diversity ideology literature and emergent coding during initial protocol testing, and used five Canadian proposals to determine the coverage and discriminant validity of the protocol. Two additional code groups emerged while testing the protocol: *Tagline, Post-Racial*. Code definitions were further refined after the protocol was applied to six U.S. proposals selected to represent a breadth of responses: the existing site of the Amazon headquarters (Puget Sound); an eventual selected site (New York City); Chula Vista, California; Chandler, Arizona; Kankakee County, Illinois; and Peabody, Massachusetts.

Protocol description

The protocol organizes nine code groups along a spectrum stretching from Diversity to Inclusion to Equity to Liberation (Abdur-Rahman, 2021): *Tagline, Liability, Access, Acceptance, Commodity, Post-Racial, Intent, Democracy or Fairness*, and *Liberation*. The entire protocol is available in the Supplementary Materials.

Tagline refers to instances where a set of people are described as "diverse" without clear delineation of what characteristics contribute to its heterogeneity. Two sub-codes are *Tagline-Workforce*, where there is a specific reference to the workforce and *Tagline-DEI* where language broadly references equity and inclusion.

Liability identifies instances where racial/ethnic diversity is not presented as advantageous. Six subcodes are *Sanitized History, Colorblind, Narrow Definition*, *Competition, Criminality*, and *Social Control. Sanitized History* refers to selective historic accounts of local history that either excise the contribution of indigenous populations and people of color or diminish the negative conditions experienced by these groups. *Colorblind* asserts racial/ethnic identities do not affect how groups are treated and/or how decision-making occurs. *Narrow Definition* limits the conversation of diversity to select, often more tenable, types of diversity. *Competition* asserts racial/ethnic diversity is incompatible with values such as meritocracy. *Criminality* expresses racial or ethnic diversity as a threat to safety. *Social Control* captures discussions of heightened security or increased police presence in relation to the challenges of a "diverse" population.

Access defines populations of color in relation to standards created by the white racial group. Three sub-codes are: *Pipeline, Creaming the Crop, and Model Minority. Pipeline* identifies programs aimed at increasing racial/ethnic diversity within an industry. *Creaming the Crop* suggests only a few members of a racial/ethnic group are qualified to meet standards of the workforce. *Model Minority* uses group membership to convey aptitude to members of a racial/ethnic group regardless of individual qualifications.

Acceptance celebrates difference but avoids discussion of structural factors that marginalize certain groups. Four sub-codes are: *Everyone Brings Diversity, Dilution, Presence, and Presence-Global. Everyone Brings Diversity* refers to statements that all differences amongst individuals are equally important while *Dilution* specifically equates different individual characteristics like generation membership, indoor activity, or preference to identities associated with historic disadvantage and marginalization. *Presence* and *Presence-Global* refer to statements that acknowledge racial/ethnic groups or foreign-born individuals and may equate their presence as evidence of inclusion with no acknowledgment that access or power differentials exist.

Commodity indicates statements where the benefits of racial/ethnic diversity are defined in terms of their economic contributions. The seven sub-codes are *Marketplace, Local Color, Economic Input, Corporate Public Relations (PR), Shared Value, and Social Entrepreneurship*. For *Marketplace*, racial/

ethnic populations are consumers of products or services and will provide higher profit margins. *Local Color* highlights contributions to local cuisine, entertainment, or an overall sense of "vibrancy." *Economic Input* links racially or ethnically diverse workers to the pool of talent. *Corporate PR* implies a more racially or ethnically diverse population in the host city will be beneficial to the company from a public relations standpoint, for example, helping Amazon foster a reputation as progressive or forward thinking. *Shared Value* frames the participation of racial/ethnic populations in the workforce in a mutually beneficial relationship with the firm. *Social Entrepreneurship* notes contributions to an entrepreneurial ecosystem that will contribute to local innovation and/or have a social impact beyond the firm's direct influence.

Post-Racial captures instances where proposals state goals around equity and inclusion were achieved without presenting evidence. These cases claim the applicant's jurisdiction represents an inclusive and integrated society.

At the end of the spectrum, *Intent* refers to statements around inclusiveness or equity that lack detail about the steps, mechanisms, or programs necessary to achieve the goals. *Democracy or Fairness* statements recognize racial/ethnic diversity and assert that mitigating the experience of discrimination and marginalization helps to achieve a democratic society. *Liberation* includes explicit discussions of both the structural factors that result in marginalization and how redistribution of resources, power, and accountability structures are necessary to support equal outcomes, not just equal opportunity.

Content analysis and reconciliation

Each proposal was content analyzed using ATLAS.ti software by two independent coders, with each of three coders randomly assigned two thirds of the sample. Due to differing racial and regional experiences of coders, we used an iterative, consensus reconciliation process for segments where coding was in conflict. The reconciliation process began with an assessment of all discrepancies between coders using a merged version of coded proposals. All three coders reviewed conflicting codes, left comments, and in-person reconciliation sessions resolved any outstanding differences. Coders then used both analytic memos and extended thematic coding within codes to determine emerging concepts and constructions and relationship within and among codes and code groups (Saldana, 2013).

Results

There is significant variation in the amount of space each proposal devotes to diversity in general and racial/ethnic diversity specifically. Coders applied over 100 codes to some proposals, while others did not receive any codes. As the overall frequency of code groups is skewed by the length and repeated use, we present the percentage of proposals by code group. Of the nine code groups, the codes within *Tagline* (84.3%) and *Acceptance* (82.9%) appeared most frequently. *Commodity* (67.1%) and *Liability* (62.9%) appeared in the majority of proposals. *Access* (44.3%), *Post-Racial* (40%), and *Intent* (37.1%) were common, but did not appear in most proposals. *Democracy or Fairness* appears in four proposals (5.7%). No proposals discussed racial/ethnic diversity as *Liberation*, which would have involved explicit description of barriers and programs to address societal deficiencies. Table 1 summarizes the percentage of proposals by code group and provides both percentage of proposals and counts for each code.

Tagline

Diversity as a tagline, used in 55 of 70 proposals, refers to instances where keywords like *diverse* or *diversity* refer to a group of people but without an explicit reference to what characteristic is the source of dissimilarity or variation. For example, "Delaware has diverse topographical options to meet the needs and lifestyles of its diverse population" (Delaware Division of Small Business, Development and

Table 1. Diversity ideology codes by percentage and number of proposals.

Code Group	Code	Short Definition	Proposals	
			%	#
Tagline 84%	Tagline	Diversity asserted with description	79%	55
	Tagline-Workforce	Diversity of workforce without description	50%	35
	Tagline-DEI	Diversity in addition to inclusivity or equity without description	12%	15
Acceptance 83%	Presence	Presence of racial/ethnic groups described/may be equated with inclusion	71%	50
	Presence-Global	Presence of racial/ethnic groups not born in US or recent immigrants described /may be equated with inclusion	64%	45
	Everyone Brings Diversity	Recognition of difference without acknowledgment of structural inequality	20%	14
	Dilution	Characteristics with and without association with historic disadvantage and marginalization are placed on equal footing	13%	9
Commodity 67%	Local Color	Racial/ethnic populations contribute to local quality of social and cultural life	61%	43
	Economic Input	Racial/ethnic employees provide strategic advantage that improve profit margins	24%	17
	Corporate PR	Presence/experiences of racially/ethnically population help burnish the company's image.	19%	13
	Shared Value	Firm sees higher profits and racially/ethnically diverse populations see direct and indirect economic benefits	13%	9
	Marketplace	Higher profits are possible if racially/ethnically population participate as consumers	9%	6
	Social Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship principles can be used to address lack of racial/ethnic diversity.	9%	6
Liability 63%	Sanitized History	Historic accounts eliminate/minimize BIPOC experiences/contributions	34%	24
	Narrow Definition	Definition of diversity excludes race/ethnicity	24%	17
	Criminality	Racial/ethnic groups associated with threat to safety	23%	16
	Competition	Racial/ethnic group performance incompatible with standards	7%	5
	Colorblind	Racial/ethnic identities do not affect treatment	3%	2
	Social Control	Racial/ethnic groups justifies preemptive regulation	1%	1
Access 44%	Pipeline	Plans, programs, project to increase diversity	33%	23
	Model Minority	Stereotypes assign aptitude based on group identity	31%	22
	Creaming the Crop	A limited number of racial/ethnic group will be able to meet workforce standards	3%	2
Post-Racial 40%	Post-Racial	Jurisdictions have achieved their racial and ethnic diversity goals and/or efforts to eliminate discrimination are complete	40%	28
Intent 37%	Intent	Achieving racial/ethnic diversity is a goal but concrete steps absent	37%	26
Democracy or Fairness 6%	Democracy or Fairness	Redressing past injustice through the involvement of racial/ethnic diverse population in the local economy	6%	4
Liberation 0%	Liberation	Racial/ethnic diversity is explicitly discussed alongside the structural factors that marginalize groups and programs and policies to address inequity.	0%	0%

Tourism & Delaware Prosperity Partnership, 2017, p. 98). Many proposals add *diversity* into lists of positive adjectives, such as Columbia, Maryland, "Howard County's quality of life is among the nation's best and its diverse, growing, well-educated and affluent population will be an attractive component of the HQ2 location" (Howard County Economic Development Authority, 2017, p. 27). *Diversity* suggests population heterogeneity, and assigns value while allowing the central concept to remain undefined.

Tagline-Workforce (35 proposals) narrows the usage of diversity to the labor force but remains vague in its definition. For instance, Orland Park states, "the I-80 Campus has access to a highly educated, diverse, and dynamic workforce" (Village of Orland Park, 2017, p. 12). The undefined use of diversity allows proposals to assert diversity enhances productivity, profitability, or can meet Amazon's workforce demands without defining the attributes within its population that help achieve those aims. *Tagline-DEI* (15 proposals) uses a similar approach with equity and inclusion. "[I]n Metro Denver, Amazon will benefit from joining a population of over 3,600,000 people. Our varied origins—42% of our population is homegrown, 58% transplanted themselves to Colorado—create an inclusive community with diverse ideas and minds" (Colorado Office of Economic Development & International Trade & Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation, 2017, p. 6).

Acceptance

Acceptance relies on presence of racial/ethnic diversity to communicate tolerance but avoids or diminishes any discussion of negative consequences associated with difference. *Presence* (50 proposals) and *Presence-Global* (45 proposals) are the most frequently used codes. The Rhode Island application asserts, "The city has been exceptionally diverse since its founding, evidenced by the fact that at its 100th anniversary parade, over 100 countries were represented" (State of Rhode Island, 2017, p. 52). Proposals often used images, tables, and figures to communicate racial or ethnic diversity without accompanying text.

Everyone Brings Diversity (14 proposals) broadly construct diversity as all differences observed among a group. By including individuals with different backgrounds or perspectives, diversity can be achieved as a matter of course because no two individuals are identical. Orlando describes itself as "a warm and welcoming region made stronger by its people who bring unique ideas, backgrounds and perspectives. Orlando is not just a region filled with diversity—it's a place where anyone can thrive" (Orlando Economic Partnership, 2017, p. 45). In other cases, sentence construction negates individual characteristics by using words like "regardless" suggesting the characteristics that would have marginalized in other arenas are insignificant in this context. The Cleveland proposal states "[r]egardless of your interests, age, nationality, race or sexual orientation, Cleveland offers a high quality of life and a unique sense of community" (City of Cleveland, 2017, p. 30).

Dilution (nine proposals) equates marginalized experiences to characteristics without connection to a history of exclusion or discrimination. Commonly, proposals would include racial or ethnic diversity in a longer list of characteristics. For example, "the talent in Massachusetts is diverse and includes the full spectrum of backgrounds, genders, ethnicities, orientations, cultures, affiliations, and perspectives to build inclusive teams, which the data shows, perform better" (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2017, p. 140).

Commodity

Commodity (47 proposals) assesses racial/ethnic populations based on their economic exchange with Amazon. While the central purpose of these proposals is to highlight how aspects of a city or region are beneficial to Amazon's bottom line, the codes within this category focus on how racial and ethnic diversity's value ranges from unidirectional profit motivations to shared social value. *Local Color*, the most common code used under *Commodity* (43 proposals), implies racial and ethnic diversity

enhances local quality of life through offering "authentic" cultural experiences, restaurants, and amenities. As Southwest Detroit states, it is:

> [o]ne of the most densely populated and culturally rich neighborhoods in the city. According to a 2010 survey, 57.2% of the 44,000 residents of the area identified as Hispanic or Latino. The community is popular for its authentic cuisine, grocery stores, and festivals celebrating Hispanic heritage. With its vibrantly colored buildings and hand painted murals, southwest Detroit 's Mexicantown is known for its Mexican cuisine, restaurants, bakeries, and shops. (Amazon Detroit Bid Committee, 2017, p. 178)

Diversity was often conflated with "vibrancy" that contributes to quality of life and a "rich cultural milieu" that appeals to millennials, in-migrants, and Amazon hires (The Office of the Mayor of Baltimore, Maryland et al., 2017). For example, Cleveland's "welcoming, vibrant neighborhoods extend beyond downtown, attracting a diverse and skilled workforce. Neighborhoods like Ohio City, Tremont, Detroit-Shoreway and Asia Town boast chef-driven and immigrant-inspired food scenes, all within a short bus, rapid transit or bicycle commute of downtown" (City of Cleveland, 2017, p. 30). Other proposals offered full page photos of performers in traditional garb at local festivals (Amazon Detroit Bid Committee, 2017, p. 182; City of New Bedford, 2017, p. 5; City of San José, 2017, p. 17).

For *Economic Input*, (17 proposals) racial and ethnic minorities are a source of talented labor directly tied to workforce needs. Although patterns similar to *Model Minority* emerge, *Economic Input* focuses on current rather than potential contributions. "As one of the world's great multicultural regions, greater Washington, D.C. is home to one of the most robust pools of international talent nationwide" (Innovation Lives Here. Northern Virginia, 2017, p. 16). In other cases, the workforce potential of racial and ethnic minority populations was de-emphasized by organization and exclusion. Atlanta states that "diversity is its secret weapon," and highlighting degree information for foreign-born individuals but no other populations in their "Racial and Ethnic Diversity" section.

Corporate PR (13 proposals) identifies statements that suggest Amazon's corporate image could benefit because their presence will improve the lives or well-being of racial/ethnically minority individuals and communities. Some proposals promise HQ2 will be a transformative force for lagging regions. Baltimore states:

> [e]stablishing its headquarters in Baltimore, a majority African American city, is a profound public statement of Amazon's commitment to diversity, inclusion and urban investment. HQ2 is a project that will transform the lives of one generation, while giving hope to the next, and permanently tie Amazon to the renaissance of one of America's greatest working-class cities. (The Office of the Mayor of Baltimore, Maryland et al., 2017, p1)

For St. Louis, a partnership with Amazon presents an opportunity to shape "new policies that will help foster equity and social justice" (St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, 2017, p. 242). Somerville "offer[s] an incentive with deeper value than the usual tax breaks. We invite Amazon to come to our region to set a new standard for corporate citizenship. We invite you to join us in pursuing an equitable vision for our future that will help lift up all in our communities" (City of Somerville, 2017, p. 3).

Shared Value (nine proposals) suggests there are bidirectional gains for both Amazon and racial/ethnically minority populations. Diversity is an input equated with creativity, strategic advantage, and entrepreneurial potential, which will increase Amazon's profitability through their hiring pool, suppliers, and local partnerships. Local community residents and organizations will gain access to employment and upward economic mobility. Newark, New Jersey argued diverse hiring has "double bottom line" benefits for the company and for equitable individual and community growth while Syracuse emphasized the possibility of "truly inclusive economic prosperity" if, at the outset, economic growth is accompanied intentionally designed programs to address poverty (City of Newark, 2017, pg 150; City of Syracuse, 2017, p. 15).

Marketplace (six proposals) assigns value to a racial/ethnic diverse population based on their spending power or as a "test-marketplace" for new products. Boston references consumer spending by immigrants, while Richmond calls itself a "perfect test market for products because of our diverse

community" (Greater Richmond Partnership, 2017, p. 105; City of Boston, 2017). *Social Entrepreneurship* (six proposals) refers to instances where applicants asserted that Amazon's entrance into the local economic ecosystem will support social entrepreneurship and social impact. Some proposals imply Amazon will benefit from being a disruptive, entrepreneurial culture. Orlando, Florida, links diversity to "an explosion of growth in the local startup community." In Syracuse, "Beyond the direct job opportunities that come with HQ2, Amazon's mere presence will create profound growth in secondary markets. Regional leaders will enhance and expand programs designed to spur minority-women and locally owned businesses—specifically inclusive equity and loan funds" (City of Syracuse, 2017, p. 18).

Liability

The codes under *Liability* appear in 44 proposals and represent instances where racial and ethnic diversity is not presented as an asset or applicants excluded or attenuated the negative experiences of marginalized racial and ethnic populations. *Sanitized History* (24 proposals) denotes examples where an applicant describes their history as a strength without acknowledging the presence, contributions of, or harms experienced by marginalized groups. Proposals often discussed historic economic foundations that make the area suitable for the HQ2 headquarters without acknowledgment of the forced displacement of indigenous populations or the use of labor from enslaved populations (i.e., references to "antebellum agriculture"). Other proposals allude to negative past social conditions but include language or phrasing to attenuate the magnitude of the harm and place the jurisdiction, retrospectively, on the right side of history. The Atlanta's proposal uses the phrase "city too busy to hate" multiple times alongside indirect acknowledgments that the oppressive conditions experienced by Black Americans in the city helped spark the civil rights movement, and then describes the civil rights movement as "one of the region's greatest contributions to the world" (p. 98). The assignment of credit to the region rather than the marginalized populations fighting oppression typifies the distancing from historical harm present in many proposals.

Narrow Definition (17 proposals) limits the definition of diversity to descriptors or demographics that do not explicitly include race or ethnicity. For example, the applications from cities such as Camden, New Jersey; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Richmond, Virginia; and Baltimore, Maryland highlight the growth in foreign-born populations as evidence of their diverse workforce or community with no mention of their substantial Black populations. In a section entitled "Increasingly Diverse Workforce," Camden, New Jersey, uses age, gender, and country of birth as descriptors to illustrate their diversity (City of Camden, Camden County & Cooper's Ferry Partnership, 2017).

Criminality (16 proposals), *Competition* (five proposals), and *Social Control* (one proposal) espouse damaging stereotypes regarding racial/ethnic groups often using statistics or tables without context. *Criminality* associates marginalized racial and ethnic groups with unsafe conditions or criminal behavior. Examples tie interventions within immigrant or communities of color directly to improvements in public safety. Most instances juxtapose a written discussion of a community's racial/ethnic diversity with crime statistics. For *Competition*, Black or Hispanic populations are over-represented in poverty and under-represented in categories like education attainment. These statistics often appear after the applicant emphasized the work ethic of the location, which emphasizes the incompatibility with values like meritocracy. These proposals do not discuss past and current discrimination that affects workforce participation and educational outcomes or other root causes contributing to inequality among racial and ethnic groups. *Social Control* justifies the regulation of the social and physical environment based on the racial/ethnic diversity of a population. The only example discusses the need for heighten public safety and community policing alongside an image of youth who are visually racial and ethnic minorities. While the request for proposals seeks information on both topics, the linkage between the two is not attributable to ordering within the RFP.

Colorblind appeared less frequently (two proposals). An example is, "Worcester's community brings people together no matter where you from, what language you speak, or the color of the

skin, you'll always feel safe" (City of Worcester, 2017, p. 59). Proposals from Virginian municipalities included profiles for fictional future Amazon employees accompanied by cartoon portrayals depicting different skin tones. While the profiles shift depending on the application, each includes the following statement, "These hypothetical profiles are intended to reflect the diversity of Amazon's workforce. From a race/ ethnicity perspective, they were randomly assigned to illustrate the variety of housing options that HQ2 employees might consider" (Hampton Roads Economic Development Alliance, 2017; Greater Richmond Partnership, 2017; Innovation Lives Here. Northern Virginia, 2017).

Access

The three sub-codes of *Access* (31 proposals) cover statements suggesting marginalized racial/ethnic groups are unqualified to participate in tech jobs (*Creaming the Crop* and *Pipeline*) or make positive assumptions about the capability of some groups to participate in the workforce without considering individual qualifications (*Model Minority*). *Pipeline* (23 proposals) most often describes programs aimed at identifying and educating under-represented or racial/ethnic minority populations to increase diversity in the tech industry. The focus on individual skill acquisition (i.e., coding) occurs absent acknowledgment of systematic issues around educational opportunities in low income and communities of color, and these programs rarely discuss creating a pipeline for individuals who already possess the requisite job skills. *Creaming the Crop* (two proposals) implies only a select few of marginalized racial/ethnic groups meet the standards for entrée into the workforce. The Pomona, California, proposal suggests Latino graduates of a single high-performing secondary school who left the area may return if Amazon locates there. "This diverse cadre of well-educated young professionals are anxious to return to their families and friends in Pomona. They represent an exceptional talent pool for Amazon" (San Gabriel Economic Partnership, 2017, p. 63). This assertion that talent exists among racial/ethnic minority groups, even if not present locally, is rare within the dataset. Instead, there is more emphasis on discussing racial or ethnic minority groups as absent from technology or innovation spheres.

Model Minority (22 proposals) equates group membership with aptitude and interest. Proposals identify first-generation immigrants and Asian-Americans as potential members of Amazon's workforce based on their presence. Statements coded as *Model Minority* commonly focus on the number of languages spoken in the region, or the percentage of the workforce that speaks a language other than English at home to demonstrate technological talent. The Bay Area proposal claims in Fremont, California, there are 98 languages spoken regionally which "demonstrat[es] that the city has been a magnet for diverse tech talent" (Bay Area Council, 2017, p. 16). Some proposals equate immigration with having "drawn from the world's best and brightest." Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, lists data for foreign-born residents alongside the percentage of the population with a graduate degree, assuming those degrees are compatible with high-tech workforce needs. The proposal from Massachusetts states:

> Boston's world class educational institutions attract the best talent from around the world; there were over 48,000 international students in the Boston region in 2015. Thirty percent of Boston's international students come from China, with the next largest groups deriving from India, South Korea, Canada, and Saudi Arabia. Our institutions are preparing the next generation of innovative tech and business employees through first class educational degrees, programs, and partnerships. (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2017, p. 140)

Adjacent paragraphs in the Massachusetts proposal describe the percentage of Black and Hispanic populations in the area with no statements about their education or contributions to the local workforce. Following sections on people living with disabilities, LGBTQ communities, and military veterans discuss their potential as future Amazon employees.

Post-racial

Post-Racial (28 proposals) covers statements proclaiming success in achieving a state of inclusivity or acceptance for either the entire population or specific historically marginalized groups. Jersey City is

"[t]he most culturally diverse and accepting city in the country" (HQ2: Jersey City, NJ, 2017, p. 2) and has "an environment supportive of all people" (HQ2: Jersey City, NJ, 2017, p. 18)." Cleveland is "a community where racial, ethnic and social diversity is not simply tolerated but is embraced and celebrated in every neighborhood as one of Cleveland's greatest assets" (City of Cleveland, 2017, p. 122). Often, the benchmark to inclusivity is defined by how the region views LGBTQ populations via a third-party ranking. "The region is also extremely inclusive—our cities are routinely ranked as some of the most LGBTQ-friendly communities in the country (Innovation Lives Here. Northern Virginia, 2017, p. 60). The City of Las Vegas experienced a score of 100 on the Human Rights Campaign Index" (*HQ2. VEGAS: Southern Nevada Proposal*, 2017).

A second grouping of post-racial statements alludes to policies or plans that eliminated all barriers to achieving equal status for all residents but does not provide evidence. The Madison, Wisconsin, proposal states:

> [w]e have advanced policies to ensure that everyone—regardless of race, religion or gender—has an opportunity to thrive in this economy. We will not allow discrimination and bias to tamp down the capacity of our citizens and we prove that every day through our actions and our policies. It is part of who we are what we do. (Madison Region Economic Partnership, 2017, p. 152)

Intent

Statements coded as *Intent* (26 proposals) articulated goals to address racial and ethnic disparities or inequalities. Many of these statements acknowledge inequitable conditions while introducing existing or future programs and initiatives aimed at reducing racial and ethnic inequalities. These statements, however, share a common construction where inequality is recognized, but both the institutions and power structures responsible for creating disparity are absent and obscured. Proposals avoid specific discussions of the racial or ethnic groups bearing the burden of discrimination and marginalization as well as details or benchmarks of success for these initiatives. Rochester communicates intent in a statement that recognizes continued disparity despite historic contributions:

> Perhaps most importantly, we are committed to a culture of tolerance and inclusiveness in Rochester. Our region was the epicenter for many of the great battles for social justice in previous centuries, including the women's rights and abolitionist movements. Those fights are not over, and we must continue to protect the rights of immigrants and refugees in our community–many of whom are contributing to our nation in medicine, science, and software engineering. (Rochester: The Cities of Light. The Cities of Innovation. The Convergence Point., 2017, p. 46)

Other proposals state their programs could be national models. St. Louis's proposal includes a section entitled "Equity and Inclusion" where it states:

> From Dred Scott to Michael Brown and the Ferguson uprising, city officials, corporations, and nonprofit partners continue with the difficult work of transcending decades of inequality in the U.S. to ensure St. Louis is a model of inclusion and social justice for the nation. The working mantra is that our community will not be defined by recent events, but rather by what we do in response. (St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, 2017, p. 204)

Examples of *Democracy or Fairness* (four proposals) echo the sentiments in the Bay Area proposal "[D]isadvantaged communities … have historically experienced unequal participation in local economic growth" and locating the site in the jurisdiction is an potential remedy. No proposals discussed diversity through a *Liberation* framing, which would have involved explicit descriptions of barriers and programs to address deficiencies within society and the system.

Discussion

Amazon's open-ended requirement for the presence and support of diverse populations provides an unstructured opportunity for stakeholders to define and value "diversity." The thematic analysis of the

codes in our project identified four tactics regularly mobilized by applicants to respond to Amazon's request: disregard for the prompt; limited engagement; acknowledgment of stratification without culpability; and value claiming via objectification or stereotypes. Several proposals ignore the call to discuss the presence and support of a diverse population completely. Others favor the use of statistics without written description and/or intersperse their proposals with undefined "diversity." Multiple proposals acknowledge social stratification but evade culpability for current conditions while declaring success in creating an inclusive community. Finally, numerous proposals highlight the value of racial/ethnic diversity, but narrowly define its usefulness through objectification or stereotypes.

Within the most frequently used codes, applicants layered multiple tactics to create an overall approach to discussing their area's diversity (specifically racial/ethnic diversity) positively, even if the content of their applications ignored past and present discrimination, perpetuated stereotypes, and advocated for race-neutral economic development unlikely to address stratification. The three most prominent were Avoidance, Surmountable Challenge, and Qualified Asset. Each of these approaches demonstrates some level of discomfiture with even cursory discussions of racial and ethnic diversity.

Avoidance

As an approach, Avoidance most often uses two tactics—disregard for the prompt and limited engagement—and is closely associated with the codes for *Presence, Presence_Global, Tagline, and Narrow Definition*. Iterations of this approach cover the complete absence of the engagement with the term *diversity*, use of an overly narrow definition, the use of demographic tables without accompanying text, or references to "diversity" without explanation. For some applicants, the absence of even a broad description of or information on diversity may reflect limited resources. These applicants provided standard recruitment materials and often emphasize potential sites rather than describing attributes of the local workforce. Absence, in this case, does not directly provide information on the local values associated with diversity. Instead, these proposals provide evidence that economic development initiatives and the recruitment of firms in these locales do not center on the specific needs or assets of the local workforce, which has implications for the employment prospects of the existing population including groups who have been historically marginalized. Given the impacts of high-wage industry attraction on the cost of living and residential displacement, avoiding discussions of both the benefits and challenges for individual workers can create harm (McCann, 2007; Zandiatashbar & Kayanan, 2020).

Many proposals include age, racial/ethnic breakdown, and educational attainment as a table without additional text discussion. Others narrowly define diversity to the exclusion of racial and ethnic minorities, even when these populations make up a substantial percentage of the local population. In both cases, the values embedded in this approach are communicated through exclusion rather than direct statements. Although vague in their definition, Amazon's RFP seeks evidence of both "the presence and support of a diverse population." Excising substantial portions of the local population from discussion of a diverse workforce or using a table circumvents the proposal's request for presence and support. This approach parallels the critiques within the diversity management literature that question if presence is even a sufficient condition to achieve goals associated with inclusion given power structures that marginalize workers of color (Jordan, 2011; Roberson, 2006).

The third iteration of the Avoidance approach prominently features "diversity" or "diverse population" early and often in proposals. The statements present diversity favorably but fail to describe what characteristics contribute to it. Numerous proposals go a step further and include ranking associated with their level of undefined diversity. These ranks seek credit for diversity (i.e., #3 most diverse workforce) without information about definition or comparison groups and the lack of a definition precludes targeted initiatives for improvement or monitoring. Given Amazon's broad conceptualization of "diversity," there is ample room to define and justify populations who contribute to an area's diversity. The imprecision of these statements coupled with the prominent placement and frequency of these statements suggest an understanding that "diversity" is of import to Amazon, but may reflect

larger societal constructions of diversity as jargon or a recognition there is a risk in defining it without guidance. This usage of diversity parallels Embrick's (2011) finding of undefined diversity being mobilized to minimize the discussion of the types of diversity associated with societal inequality, such as race and gender. Applicants can claim diversity and its appeal to attract a firm while not grappling with the reality of racial and economic inequalities (Collins, 2011).

Surmountable challenge

This approach acknowledges racial/ethnic diversity but circumvents culpability for stratification along racial/ethnic lines. Superficially, this construction appears positive, as it suggests inequitable employment and economic conditions are not inevitable and can be addressed through deliberate action. However, in cases explicitly discussing racial and ethnic minority groups, applicants framed the challenges surrounding "diversity" as either a remnant of past conditions without acknowledging discrimination (*Sanitized History*), focused on the individual rather than systematic deficiencies (*Pipeline*), or claimed success or a pathway to success without evidence (*Intent; Corporate PR; Post-Racial*).

Proposals routinely link their area's historical industrial roots or economic innovation and their readiness to house Amazon's second headquarters. However, an area's labor history is fraught as U.S. history is replete with examples where an individual or group's race/ethnicity, gender, immigration status, or class negatively affected their job prospects. The resulting sections either ignored the root causes associated with present conditions or briefly acknowledged historic conditions but avoid responsibility while claiming credit for marginalized populations' contributions to the area's economic conditions. Ignoring the negative economic conditions characterized by racism, sexism, classism, and xenophobia alters the problem definition economic development is attempting to address. If historic and systematic bias are not acknowledged as a contributing factor, the discrepancy observed among certain groups remains at the individual level, rather than the result of compounding, systematic issues. Superficial acknowledgment of discriminatory historic conditions that pivot rapidly to claim credit ignores power structures and absolves those structures of active contributions to economic stratification. This approach stands in contrast to recognizing how most economic growth strategies are not actively working toward lessening economic inequality and, therefore, situating Amazon's attraction within broader economic equity goals (Fainstein, 2010; Fitzgerald & Leigh, 2002; Stone, 2010).

There is a connection between efforts to avoid or minimize the role of systems and institutions in perpetuating uneven access and inequitable outcomes and the solutions prominently featured in proposals. The most frequent solution was pipeline programs aimed at preparing historically marginalized racial and ethnic youth for employment at Amazon and in the tech field. While touted as a pathway to a more racially and ethnically diverse population for tech jobs, these programs assign the lack of preparedness in these communities to individual students rather than to racially and economically segregated education systems with differential funding. As a solution most often aimed at youth, this intervention will require time and explains the current lack of racial/ethnic diversity observed in tech jobs as a supply issue, while data from the National Science Foundation suggest there is also a demand issue. The Center for American Progress reported a population of over ~200,000 Americans of color (Black, Hispanic and American Indian) with bachelor's or advanced degrees associated with high-tech positions who also experience an unemployment rate above white professionals in the tech field or have sought employment outside of the tech industry. There is clear documentation of biases against racial/ethnic minorities in recruitment, retention, and promotion within corporate settings in both tech and non-tech positions (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Carayon et al., 2001; Landau, 1995). The promotion of pipeline programs reduces the complex barriers keeping racial/ethnic minorities out of the tech industry and suggests the problem will resolve once pipeline students enter the workforce.

Surmountable Challenge as an approach also encompasses proposals that highlight goals to address economic disparities without policy or programs descriptions. Applicants frequently stated broad goals to address disparities without explicitly discussing which groups have borne the burden of past discrimination or the actions required to remediate current conditions. Given the constraints of the proposal structure, we did not expect a detailed overview of these programs, projects, and policies. However, an interesting common thread is the value-claiming that accompanied goal setting. Many proposals asserted their initiatives could be a model for other places throughout the country even as they fail to provide information about the root causes of current conditions or the populations most affected by inequitable policies. Other proposals offered value claiming to Amazon as an enticement to locate in an area. Jurisdictions promise Amazon the opportunity to shape policies for equity and social justice. There is acknowledgment of disparate conditions and even recognition that institutions, government agencies, and private partners have a role in addressing unjust economic hierarchies. Amazon can locate in an area and have some undefined policy influence that will result in economic and social justice. Race and ethnicity are prominently mobilized in one iteration but less emphasized in the other. Proposals promising value claiming to Amazon were more likely to mention race or ethnicity explicitly, whereas proposals with goals aimed at addressing economic stratification remain vague about which groups were disproportionately affected. The result is the offer of accolades, while mechanisms to reshape current economic stratification remain unclear.

Layering tactics of avoidance, acknowledgment, and value-claiming, multiple proposals concede that achieving social equity is challenging, but asserting the area has already successfully addressed disparities. The implication is there is no need for further action. These proposals often juxtapose statements about how an area accepts LGBTQIA+ populations (usually through a third-party ranking). The assertion defines acceptance of LGBTQIA+ populations as a threshold that automatically includes other marginalized groups, despite the differences in how these groups may be discussed in a proposal. For example, in the Massachusetts proposal, the applicant lists the potential contribution of LGBTQIA+ populations as a future asset for Amazon's workforce in the same section where the discussion of Black and Hispanic populations was limited to their percentage of the local population. Thus, these declarations of inclusivity co-exist with instances of racial/ethnic bias in the area's presentation of the capability and assets of current residents. In fact, the existing economic stratification by race/ethnicity implicitly can continue as (1) these areas flatten differences across marginalized groups and (2) assert their achievement of economic inclusivity without definition or evidence.

Qualified asset

This approach utilizes positive representations of racial and ethnic populations, but the use of value claiming via objectification and stereotypes tempers its more inclusive construction. Most frequently, this approach appears with codes for *Local Color* and *Model Minority*. *Local Color* restricts the value of the racial and/or ethnic population to their addition of "authenticity" to the local social scene. Although business owners or performers from racial/ethnic minority groups may receive monetary support from patrons, their indirect contribution is through food, music, and cultural amenities to enhance leisure and recreational experiences rather than as members of the future Amazon workforce. Few instances of the code's usage suggest an established ethnic community could provide social support or a sense of community to Amazon employees, but those suggestions exclude racial/ethnic minorities born in the U.S.

There was a conspicuous difference in how foreign-born racial /ethnic minority populations and domestic-born racial/ethnic minority populations were discussed with respect to their current or potential contributions to the workforce. In many proposals, membership in a racial or ethnic minority not born in the U.S. automatically qualifies an individual to be part of Amazon's future workforce. These proposals often presented the percentage of their population who identified as foreign-born as sufficient evidence that the area could provide Amazon with their preferred workforce. In contrast, proposals do not present racial or ethnic populations born in the U.S. (most often Black

and Hispanic populations) as workforce assets. Instead, proposals limited their discussion to statements about an achievement gap or the need for readiness programs—even in proposals that highlight Historically Black or Hispanic serving institutions of higher education. These stereotypical depictions are damaging in both iterations. The perpetuation of the model minority myth treats the target group as monolithic, which obscures in-group economic stratification and limits aptitude to predetermined professions. This myth also minimizes the racism experienced by the target group and other racial/ethnic groups. On the other hand, groups already marginalized within the economic system, and in some locales, large portions of the applicants' population, are not considered nor presented as a potential employment pool for firms likely to receive substantial local and state incentives.

Conclusion

Equitable economic development encompasses the capabilities of individuals to find meaningful careers, achieve mobility, avoid displacement, and enjoy high-quality of life (Lowe & Feldman, 2017; Fitzgerald & Leigh, 2002; Stone, 2010). Atlanta, Georgia's proposal dismissed concerns of racial injustice by referencing its historic label as a "city too busy to hate" (It's Day One in Atlanta, 2017). Numerous proposals echoed this ethos: productive, progressive, international metropolises where diversity is present but unobtrusive, and where prejudice and injustices are artifacts of the past. The value of racial/ethnic diversity is limited to the economic value individuals might provide to Amazon rather than genuine appreciation for differences, particularly life experiences associated with their racial or ethnic identity. The issue of this orientation is twofold. While we did not expect many proposals to espouse the inclusion of racial/ethnic minority population as a step toward fulfilling the promise of democracy or include steps about the redistribution of power to redress structural harm, we expected proposals to discuss workers and their contributions to a "diverse workforce" as valuable to both individual and corporate outcomes. Instead, we see proposals upholding racial/ethnic stereotypes about who can be part of this new, well-paid workforce. Our analysis suggests persistent support for the creation and reinforcement of a hierarchy using a growth model, which does not value the individual employee, let alone historically marginalized populations. Displacement fueled by tech-sector fueled growth will disproportionately affect marginalized communities (Parilla & Liu, 2018; Zandiatashbar & Kayanan, 2020), and the absence of any discussion centering Black and Hispanic workers in a local economy implies acceptance of this consequence.

Our coding framework can be applied broadly to economic development initiatives, plans, and policies. We hope the stakeholders involved in local economic development can reflect on current practices and refocus goals to include equity and justice principles, centering the experiences of marginalized groups as a central tenet of success, instead of narrowly focusing on growth as an isolated goal (Fainstein, 2010).

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