COMPLAINT

MILLER BARONDESS, LLP

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million (0.002% of the total pledged by the largest corporations). This is despite African Americans representing over 30% of fast food consumers and McDonald's stores earning billions of dollars each year from African Americans.

- 3. McDonald's minimal pledge is a reflection of its culture. McDonald's has repeatedly faced racial discrimination lawsuits from its franchisees, employees and suppliers alleging that McDonald's has a racist corporate culture and a track record of discriminating on the basis of race. In fact, 55% of McDonald's shareholders recently voted for McDonald's to submit to a civil rights audit, notwithstanding McDonald's opposition.
- 4. Plaintiffs are part of a conglomerate of related media companies, all of which are ultimately 100% owned by Byron Allen ("Allen"), an African American entrepreneur. Together, Allen's companies (collectively, "Allen Media Group" or "AMG") comprise the largest African American-owned media company in the country.
- 5. In the wake of the George Floyd murder and the Black Lives Matter movement, Allen created the Black Owned Media Matters ("BOMM") movement to address racial discrimination and systemic racism in media. Prominent African American entrepreneurs joined Allen and the BOMM movement to raise awareness on these important issues.
- 6. Allen specifically called out McDonald's as an advertiser who did not meaningfully support Black Owned Media. In March 2021, AMG affiliated entities informed McDonald's, in writing, that they had been victims of racial discrimination in contracting in violation of 42 U.S.C. § 1981. A copy of the notice is attached as Exhibit 1.
- 7. In an effort to deflect from these very serious allegations, in May 2021, McDonald's announced its "four-year plan." This plan included a commitment for McDonald's to increase its spend with Black Owned Media from 2% to 5% by 2024. McDonald's spends in excess of a billion dollars per year on advertising.
- 8. AMG is by far the largest African American-owned media company in the country, and Plaintiffs represent over 90% of that category. As such, to fulfill its commitment, any allocation would require McDonald's to spend in excess of \$50 million annually to advertise on Plaintiffs' properties.

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- 9. In reliance on McDonald's commitment, Plaintiffs put together a proposal for McDonald's to advertise across their portfolio and spent considerable time and effort to pursue this opportunity.
- 10. McDonald's rebuffed Plaintiffs, proposing to spend only a tiny fraction of its advertising budget on Plaintiffs' properties. This allocation left McDonald's well short of its public commitment.
- 11. McDonald's stated in 2021 that it was spending 2% of its national advertising budget on Black Owned Media, which was a lie, and it committed that the spend would reach 5% by 2024.
- 12. In 2021, McDonald's was not spending anywhere close to 2% of its national advertising budget on Black Owned Media under any definition; nor did it spend anywhere close to its commitment after 2021.
- 13. Under its "four-year plan," McDonald's should now be spending 4% of its national advertising budget on Black Owned Media, but McDonald's is not coming anywhere close to meeting that commitment.
- 14. McDonald's rushed out its "four-year plan" in a self-serving ploy to cast itself as racially sensitive and sympathetic—but really to intentionally mislead the public and with reckless disregard for the truth. McDonald's had no intent to fulfill its commitment. It's "plan" was and is a fraud.
- 15. By and through this action, Plaintiffs demand compensation for McDonald's fraudulent and false promises, which is estimated to be in excess of \$100 million. Plaintiffs also seek a permanent injunction requiring McDonald's to comply with its pledge to all Black Owned Media.
- 16. California law expressly recognizes, and makes enforceable, false promises such as the one made by McDonald's herein; and the information herein is all in the public record and publicly available.

PARTIES

Plaintiff Weather Group, LLC is a Delaware limited liability company 17.

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headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. It is wholly owned by TV Holdings 1, LLC, a Delaware limited liability company. TV Holdings 1, LLC is wholly owned by Entertainment Studios Media Holdings, Inc., a Delaware corporation.

- 18. Plaintiff Entertainment Studios Networks, Inc. is a California corporation headquartered in Los Angeles, California.
- 19. Defendant McDonald's USA, LLC is a Delaware limited liability company headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. McDonald's USA, LLC is wholly owned by McDonald's Corporation, a Delaware corporation.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 20. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this controversy, and the amount-incontroversy exceeds the jurisdictional minimum.
- 21. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to California Code of Civil Procedure sections 395 and 395.5.

FACTS COMMON TO ALL CAUSES OF ACTION

- 22. AMG was founded in 1993 by Byron Allen, an African-American actor, comedian and media entrepreneur. Allen is the sole owner of AMG.
- 23. Allen first made his mark in the television world in 1979 as the youngest comedian ever to appear on "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson." He thereafter served as the cohost of NBC's "Real People," one of the first reality shows on television.
- 24. Alongside his "on-screen" career, Allen developed a keen understanding of the "behind the scenes" television business. Allen used his industry knowledge to build AMG into an independent, global media company.

A. AMG Is the Largest Black-Owned Media Company in the Country

- 25. Allen has full ownership and control of AMG. As such, AMG is the largest African American-owned media company in the nation.
- 26. There is no other African American-owned media company that approaches the scale of AMG and the breadth of its suite of offerings. AMG is the largest supplier of first-run syndicated programming for broadcast television stations, with over 5,000 hours of content in its

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- 27. AMG also owns 36 broadcast affiliate tv stations (NBC, ABC, CBS and Fox) in 21 geographic markets.
- 28. AMG owns and operates 10, 24-hour HD television networks that are carried by all major multi-channel video programming distributors and that reach over 220 million people.
- 29. In 2018, AMG purchased Weather Group, the parent company that owns and operates The Weather Channel, along with popular digital properties PATTRN and Local Now.
- 30. AMG also owns and operates the Grio, a popular website and channel featuring content targeted to young African Americans.
- 31. AMG owns and operates HBCU GO, a streaming platform that exclusively streams 99% of all Historically Black Colleges and Universities college sports.
- 32. Recently, AMG acquired the Black News Channel which has been rebranded as TheGRIO-TV.
- 33. Plaintiffs represent in excess of 90% of the market of African American-owned linear television and digital media properties. Because of the depth and breadth of Plaintiffs' portfolio, they attract millions of viewers and provide more opportunities for advertising than any other African American-owned media company by a large margin.

В. McDonald's

- 34. McDonald's is one of the largest corporations in the world. It is the world's leading global foodservice retailer with over 39,000 locations in over 100 countries. In 2019, its worldwide stores generated over \$100 billion in revenue.
- 35. On information and belief, McDonald's spends over \$1 billion dollars per year advertising on content produced and distributed by media companies in the United States.

C. American Corporations Pledge to Combat Systemic Racism

36. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African American, was murdered by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The murder was caught on video, and it sparked a nationwide outcry and protests. The event became a symbol for how intentional and systemic racism remain significant problems in this country.

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- 37. In the wake of the George Floyd murder, American corporations spoke out against racial injustice and pledged approximately \$50 billion in spending to address systemic racism.
- 38. McDonald's was an outlier amongst the largest American corporations. It only pledged to spend \$1 million to address racial injustice and systemic racism (0.002% of the total amount pledged).

D. Allen Calls Out McDonald's for Its Failure to Support Black Owned Media

- 39 The George Floyd murder brought back vivid childhood memories for Allen. The convoys of law enforcement and National Guard troops that drove through communities across the country were reminiscent of the troops that were deployed in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- 40. Ever since that tragedy, Allen has revered Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his vision for ONE America. A year before he was assassinated, Dr. King gave a speech at Stanford University titled "The Other America." In that speech, Dr. King taught that there are two Americas, where one has access to opportunity, a good education, jobs, bank loans, human and civil rights, but the other America does not. Dr. King warned that the country could not survive as two Americas.
- 41. In founding his media company, Allen wanted to show others that it was possible for an African American to own and control a media company that could compete against entrenched, white-owned media companies that were founded nearly 100 years ago.
- 42. But despite the strides that have been made over the past 60 years, Allen and other African American media entrepreneurs were still facing discrimination and systemic racism, including from Madison Avenue in the advertising business.
- 43. As a result, Allen created the BOMM movement to bring awareness to the issues facing Black Owned Media. Allen spoke out about racial injustice directed towards members of the African American community, and he wrote opinion pieces that were published in major national publications, such as The New York Times.
- 44. Allen also appeared on webinars where he called out corporations that continue to discriminate against African Americans by not doing business with Black-owned businesses. On

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one of these webinars, Allen specifically mentioned McDonald's as one such corporation.

- 45. Most public corporations across business segments leaned in with significant commitments towards the African American community. In media, most major advertisers agreed to increase their spend on Black Owned Media.
- 46. McDonald's did not. Unlike its peers, McDonald's did not make a significant pledge to support the African American community.

E. McDonald's False Promise

- 47. In March 2021, Allen Media affiliated entities notified McDonald's that it had refused to contract in violation of 42 U.S.C. § 1981.
- 48. McDonald's thereafter announced its "four-year plan." As part of this plan, McDonald's pledged to increase its spend with African American-owned media.
- 49. McDonald's promised that it would increase its spend with Black Owned Media from 2% to 5% from 2021 to 2024. A true and correct copy of McDonald's announcement is attached hereto as Exhibit 2.
- 50. In 2021, when McDonald's publicized its "four-year plan," McDonald's was spending de minimis sums with Plaintiffs. Given the size of McDonald's advertising budget, and the size of AMG, McDonald's spend on Black Owned Media did not come close to 2% of its budget.
- 51. By now, McDonald's should be spending approximately 4% of its budget on Black Owned Media. For McDonald's to meet its public commitments using any reasonable allocation, McDonald's would need to spend approximately \$50 million per year to advertise on Plaintiffs' properties.
- 52. But McDonald's is not spending anywhere close to that amount with Plaintiffs or other Black Owned Media.

F. Plaintiffs Relied on McDonald's False Promise

53. After learning about McDonald's commitment, Plaintiffs created proposals for how McDonald's could fulfill its commitment and receive value for its investment across Plaintiffs' portfolio.

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- 54. Plaintiffs spent considerable time and effort to pursue this opportunity year after year, but McDonald's refused to increase its allocation to Plaintiffs.
- 55. McDonald's lied about its spend with Black Owned Media and never had an intent to fulfill its commitment to reach 5% by 2024.
- 56. Plaintiffs have been harmed, as have all Black Owned Media, by McDonald's failure to honor its promise.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

(Fraud – False Promise (Cal. Civ. Code § 1711))

- 57. Plaintiffs incorporate each of the foregoing and subsequent paragraphs as though fully set forth herein.
- 58. California Civil Code section 1711 provides that "[o]ne who practices a deceit with intent to defraud the public, or a particular class of persons, is deemed to have intended to defraud every individual in that class, who is actually misled by the deceit."
- 59. McDonald's made a material misrepresentation when it stated that it would increase its spend with Black Owned Media from 2% in 2021 to 5% in 2024.
 - 60. McDonald's made this promise with no intention to honor it.
- 61. McDonald's intended to defraud the general public, its shareholders and investors, the government, and Black Owned Media, including Plaintiffs.
- 62. Plaintiffs actually and justifiably relied to their detriment on McDonald's false promise.
 - 63. McDonald's false promise was a substantial factor in causing harm to Plaintiffs.
- 64. Plaintiffs' damages are subject to proof at trial, but are currently estimated to exceed \$100 million.
- 65. Plaintiffs also seek punitive damages to punish and make an example of McDonald's for its oppression, fraud and malice.
- 66. Plaintiffs also seek equitable relief to ensure that McDonald's honors its promise after entry of judgment. To that end, Plaintiffs seeks a permanent injunction that will require McDonald's to:

MILLER BARONDESS, LLP	ATTORNEYS AT LAW	2121 Avenue of the Stars. Suite 2600 Los Angeles, California 90067	Tel.: (310) 552-4400 Fax: (310) 552-8400
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5		ad revenue to Black Owned Media for the reporting period.
6	67.	Because this is a lawsuit seeking enforcement of an important right affecting public
7	interest whic	h will confer benefits on the general public, Plaintiffs also seek attorneys' fees under
8	Civil Proced	ure Code § 1021.5.
9		PRAYER FOR RELIEF
10	WHE	REFORE, Plaintiffs pray for judgment as follows:
11	1.	General, special and compensatory damages in excess of \$100 million, or
12	according to	proof at trial;
13	2.	Punitive and exemplary damages;
14	3.	Attorneys' fees as allowable by law;
15	4.	Costs, pre- and post-judgment interest to the fullest extent allowable by law;
16	5.	Permanent injunctive relief requiring McDonald's to:
17		(a) Spend at least 5% of its ad budget on Black Owned Media annually; and
18		(b) Provide annual reports to the Court identifying (i) the ad budget for the
19		reporting period, (ii) the Black Owned Media companies that received ad
20		revenue out of the budget for the reporting period, and (iii) the allocation of
21		ad revenue to Black Owned Media for the reporting period.
22	6.	For such other relief as the Court deems just and proper.
23	DATED: M	ay 4, 2023 MILLER BARONDESS, LLP
24		l h
25		By:
26		LOUIS R. MILLER Attorneys for PLAINTIFFS
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COMPLAINT

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Spend at least 5% of its ad budget on Black Owned Media annually; and

Provide annual reports to the Court identifying (i) the ad budget for the

reporting period, (ii) the Black Owned Media companies that received ad

revenue out of the budget for the reporting period, and (iii) the allocation of

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JURY TRIAL DEMAND

Plaintiff demands a jury trial on all claims so triable.

DATED: May 4, 2023

MILLER BARONDESS, LLP

By:

LOUIS R. MILLER

Attorneys for PLAINTIFFS

MILLER BARONDESS, LLP Attorners at Law 2121 Avenue of the Stars, Suite 2600 Los angeles, California 90067 Tel: (310) 552-4400 Fax: (310) 552-8400

INDEX OF EXHIBITS

Exhibit No.	Description	Pg. No.
1.	Letter from LRM to McDonalds CEO General Counsel, 03-03-2021	12-16
2.	McDonald's Increasing Spend with Diverse-Owned Media, Content and Production Partners	17-24

COMPLAINT 612786.4

EXHIBIT 1

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March 3, 2021

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Via Email and Certified Mail-Return Receipt Requested

Christopher Kempczinski McDonald's Corporation President & Chief Executive Officer 110 North Carpenter St Chicago, IL 60607 (630)623-3000 chris.kempczinski@us.mcd.com

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General Counsel
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Re: Entertainment Studios – McDonald's

Dear Messrs. Kempczinski and Mses. Hussain:

A. Entertainment Studios

Our law firm represents Entertainment Studios and related entities ("ES") owned by African American businessman Byron Allen.

ES owns and operates eight television channels including The Weather Channel, Justice Central, Pets.tv, Recipe.tv, MyDestination.tv, ES.tv, Cars.tv and Comedy.tv. These are general interest and lifestyle channels carried by more than 60 multi-channel video distributors in the United States including DirecTV, AT+T U-Verse, Comcast, AT+T Now, Verizon FIOS, Dish Network, Mediacom, Frontier, RCN and many others.

The ES channels are distributed to over 80 million subscribers in all 50 states. They have been nominated for and won Emmy Awards.

March 3, 2021 McDonald's Page 2

ES also owns 16 ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox network affiliate broadcast television stations. Altogether, its television stations and 24 hour HD channels/streaming services serve nearly 180 million subscribers. ES will add its ninth network, The Weather Channel En Espanol, in 2021. ES also owns and operates the Local Now streaming service which delivers news, weather, traffic, sports and lifestyle content; and it's one of the largest independent producers/distributors of first run syndicated television programming in the country.

Through its international division, ES licenses its programming in South Africa, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UAE. Its library has over 5,000 hours of owned content across multiple genres; and it provides content to multiple outlets including broadcast television stations, cable platforms, mobile devices and the World Wide Web.

In 2016, ES purchased TheGrio, a digital video news service devoted to providing African Americans with stories and information under-represented in existing national news outlets. TheGrio features aggregated and original video packages, articles and opinion pieces on breaking news, politics, health, business and entertainment. This platform focuses on digital content and has more than 80 million annual visitors.

B. Racial Discrimination

I'm writing because for some time McDonald's has refused to advertise on the ES channels. This is despite the ES channels being African American owned and African Americans comprising 14 percent of the country's population and spending billions on McDonald's Food & Beverage products.

As the only African American owned multi-channel operator in the country, ES has been trying for years to sell ad time to your company. Its efforts have been rebuffed or ignored. I'm writing to make you aware of this injustice—and consequent violation of law—and ask that you address and remedy it. A refusal to contract, on account of race, violates federal law; and we believe that's what has occurred here.

A hundred and fifty-five years ago, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 to bring freed slaves into the nation's economy. Section 1 of that statute, codified in §1981(a), provides that "[a]ll persons . . . shall have the same right . . . to make and enforce contracts . . . as is enjoyed by white citizens." 42 U.S.C. §1981. This law is so ingrained in our history, and so important to people of color, that the United States Supreme Court created a private right of action for racial discrimination in contracting not only against government but against private parties as well.

African Americans have made great strides in our country in the 155 years since §1981 was enacted, but not as owners and operators of media. There, they have been starved of capital

March 3, 2021 McDonald's Page 3

and almost completely shut out. The failure by McDonald's to purchase ad time on the ES channels is furthering this inequity. It's denying economic inclusion to African Americans and is violating §1981's prohibition on racial discrimination in contracting.

C. Remedy

We want you to step up and do your part to help solve this problem. Despite comprising 14 percent of the population and spending billions on your company's products, there's been almost nothing coming back to African American owned media. Our client is not asking for parity. We're not asking that you spend 14 percent of your ad budget on Black-owned media. All we're asking for is a fair opportunity so that the ES channels are treated the same as white-owned channels, as the law requires. I'm sure your company spends millions advertising on white-owned media.

When ES tried to sell your company ad time, it was ignored or given excuses. This is directly contrary to McDonald's public statements about being a good corporate citizen and supporting policies that promote fairness, equality and respect for people. These words ring hollow with respect to how you've treated ES.

For your information, ES had a similar experience in the cable business, filed lawsuits under §1981 and prevailed against several major video distributors. Unlike that situation, we would like to work this out amicably, if possible. To that end, our client requests that instead of matching the ad spend with the African American population's 14 percent, you allocate just 2 percent of your ad spend to the ES channels as a start; and, of course, you'll get valuable advertising exposure in the process.

D. Conclusion

We're making this request of McDonald's because it's the right thing to do. African American owned media has been denied access to mainstream white ad dollars. It's past due time to remedy this situation. Ad dollars and how they're spent are a big part of the reason why Black-owned media is so capital constrained and close to non-existent. This should not be difficult for McDonald's, with a total U.S. Advertising spending in 2019 of \$1,600,000,000. Two percent of ad revenue would equal \$32,000,000.

It's very important that your Board of Directors be made aware of the contents of this letter; and we ask that you provide each and every member of your Board with a copy. As you

¹ https://www.forbes.com/sites/isabeltogoh/2020/09/01/mcdonalds-faces-1-billion-discrimination-lawsuit-from-dozens-of-black-ex-franchise-owners/?sh=192145ad6655 (Mr. Kempczinski acknowledging the company's problems with race and vowing to do better).

March 3, 2021 McDonald's Page 4

and they know, Black-owned businesses have been severely disadvantaged and left behind in the economy of our country. This has been written about extensively, including a recent *Wall Street Journal* article titled "How Much Can 'Buy Black' Shopping Lift Black-Owned Businesses?" (https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-much-can-buy-black-shopping-lift-black-owned-businesses-11607099170). This is the opportunity for your company to do something about it.

Last, please be advised that this letter and the request herein is not being written for purposes of settlement or seeking to resolve a dispute. Rather, it's written to put you on notice of a significant inequity and what we believe to be a serious violation of federal law. All our rights and remedies are reserved. Thank you for your consideration; and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Louis R. Miller

LRM:dd

EXHIBIT 2



McDonald's Increasing Spend with Diverse-Owned Media, Content and Production Partners

May 20, 2021

McDonald's Increasing Spend with Diverse-Owned Media, Content and Production Partners

New commitments also include long-term partnership investments and actions to help dismantle growth barriers for diverse-owned companies

(CHICAGO – May 20, 2021) – McDonald's USA today announced bold new investments to further reflect its diverse customers, crew members and communities in its marketing.

Over the next four years, the company and Owner/Operators are accelerating the allocation of advertising dollars to diverse-owned media companies, production houses and content creators. McDonald's total investment in diverse-owned partners – including Black, Hispanic, Asian Pacific American, Women and LGBTQ-owned platforms – will more than double, moving from 4% to 10% of national advertising spend between 2021 and 2024. Spend with Black-owned properties, specifically, will increase from 2% to 5% of national advertising spend over this time period.

Additionally, McDonald's will forge new multi-year partnerships with diverse-owned media companies. This longer-term funding will help bolster individual businesses, strengthen the broader marketing supply chain, and support inclusive, authentic storytelling between McDonald's brand and diverse customers.

"We've been making serious commitments that are guided by our values, and with this latest move, we're taking action to advance diverse-owned companies across the marketing supply chain," said Morgan Flatley, Chief Marketing and Digital Customer Experience Officer, McDonald's

USA. "We're using our resources to support these platforms and businesses, which keep the brand at the center of culture while creating deeper relationships with our diverse customers, crew and employees."

"As a Black female entrepreneur, I am proud to be a part of McDonald's continued effort to meet Women and diverse-owned businesses where they are by providing much-needed resources to do business in an ever-evolving marketplace," said Vicki Chancellor, Chair, McDonald's USA Franchisee Marketing Committee. "It's who we are as a leading brand that is doing our part to help underserved communities thrive."

McDonald's four-year plan includes commitments to:

- Increase national investments in diverse-owned companies from 4% to 10%. Spend with Black-owned media and production properties will increase from 2% to 5%, and additional investments will follow with other diverse segments including Hispanic, Asian Pacific American, Women and LGBTQ-owned properties.
- Forge multi-year partnerships with diverse-owned media and production companies, content-creators and influencers to support their businesses for sustainable, long-term growth; strengthen the marketing supply chain; enable deeper, more inclusive storytelling; and foster conduits for cultural connectivity.
- Form an advisory board of external marketing and advertising subject matter
 experts dedicated to identifying the biggest barriers to economic opportunity facing diverse
 partners and putting collective resources behind new programs and initiatives to eliminate
 them. The group's focus will be to drive change and impact across the industry.

This plan builds upon the company's longstanding relationships with diverse-owned marketing and communications companies including The Boden Agency, Lopez Negrete, IW Group and Burrell Communications Group, a full-service agency and McDonald's partner of 50 years. It also follows the inaugural Media Partner Summit that McDonald's hosted in November 2020, which convened diverse-owned media companies to identify mutually beneficial partnership opportunities that align with McDonald's overall marketing strategy and goals. This Summit will be held annually to create and strengthen connections with both new and existing partners across diverse segments.

In addition to marketing partners, McDonald's has a long history of purchasing goods and services from other businesses and suppliers that represent the diverse communities it serves. New commitments to reduce barriers and increase spend with diverse suppliers were shared in the company's broader <u>Global Diversity</u>, <u>Equity and Inclusion aspiration</u> announced last July.

About McDonald's USA

McDonald's USA, LLC, serves a variety of menu options made with quality ingredients to nearly 25 million customers every day. Ninety-five percent of McDonald's 14,000 U.S. restaurants are independently owned and operated by businessmen and women. For more information,

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visit <u>www.mcdonalds.com</u>, or follow us on Twitter @McDonalds and Facebook <u>www.facebook.com/mcdonalds.</u>

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McDonald's USA Names EGAMI Group as Public Relations Agency of Record for its U.S. African American Consumer Market

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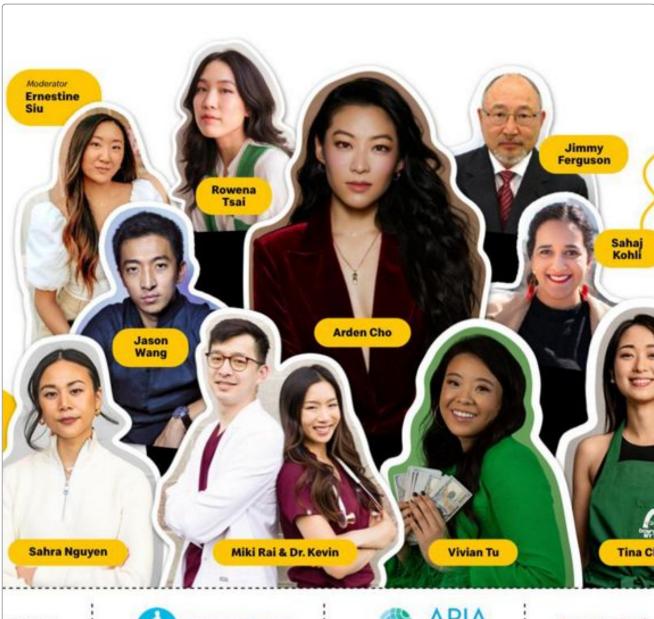


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