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Interscope Records
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Supersonic PR
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Rebel Waltz Inc.
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Laguna Beach, CA
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An Open Letter to No Doubt, Supersonic Public Relations and Interscope Records in Response to No Doubt's Video, "Looking Hot":

The American Indian Studies Center is a research institute founded in 1969 at the University of California, Los Angeles, dedicated to addressing American Indian issues and supporting Indian nations. The Center also serves as a bridge between the academy and indigenous peoples locally, nationally, and internationally, with a goal of advancing understandings between Native and non-Native communities. One particular challenge faced by American Indians in the United States is a perceived invisibility and a corresponding lack of understanding of the contemporary existence and relevance of Native peoples. We work to dismantle such barriers at the American Indian Studies Center, which remain due to a lack of knowledge about Native communities, including, for example, the fact that Los Angeles is home to the nation's largest urban Native American population.

This perceived invisibility holds numerous consequences for Native peoples, including perceptions that American Indians are mere historical relics, frozen in time as stereotypically savage, primitive, uniquely-spiritualized and – in the case of Native women – hyper-sexualized objects to be tamed. No Doubt's recent "Looking Hot" music video, released to fans via its Facebook page on November 2, 2012, is replete with such highly offensive and destructive images of Native peoples in general and Native women specifically.

The music video demonstrates the height of cultural misappropriation and a complete indifference towards and ignorance about contemporary Indian people. The video at once employs Native imagery and symbols, many of which still hold deep spiritual and ceremonial significance for Native Americans – including feathers, tipis, and fire – while at the same time situating such imagery in a (largely inaccurate) set of depictions of Indians at the turn of the century as primitive peoples fighting cowboys (and losing) in the Wild West. In this sense, the video diminishes Native people and Native cultures while,

simultaneously, co-opting Indians and indigeneity for exploitative gain. In essence, it represents the grossest kind of cultural misappropriation.

Most importantly, however, the video is rife with imagery that glorifies aggression against Indian people, and, most disturbingly, denigrates and objectifies Native women through scenes of sexualized violence. Much like the 19th century paintings advancing the ethos of manifest destiny¹ – the belief that the United States was destined to expand across the continent, bringing civilization and light to a primitive people – the video draws on familiar tropes of the conquest of the continent and, concomitantly, the ravage of the Native female. As lead singer Gwen Stefani writhes, partially dressed (as an Indian) and shackled in ropes while overseen by domineering white men brandishing pistols, today real Native American women in the United States are in a state of crisis.

In Indian country today, Indian nations may not criminally prosecute non-Indians who commit crimes in Indian country, including violent crimes against Native women and girls.² In the United States today, approximately one in three American Indian and Alaskan Native women will be raped in their lifetimes.³ A recent Amnesty International report, “Maze of Injustice,” details the barriers Indian women face in accessing adequate justice systems when they are the victims of violent crime.⁴ Additional research studies indicate that certain crimes – such as the rape of Indian women, for example – are primarily perpetrated by non-Indian men.⁵ And all American Indians experience victimization from violent crimes at rates more than twice the national average.⁶

Re-authorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) would make great strides towards responding to these gross injustices against Native women, by authorizing Indian nations to prosecute non-Indian offenders of domestic violence in limited circumstances.⁷ VAWA has found strong support, and it resoundingly passed the Senate in May 2012. However, the Act has stalled in the House due to the all-too-familiar political gridlock that holds this, and other meaningful legislation, hostage.

We commend No Doubt, Interscope, and Supersonic for making the decision to pull the “Looking Hot” video immediately from the Internet upon learning of the overwhelming response from the Native community. We also want to make clear that, while No Doubt’s apology claimed to have consulted “Native American studies experts at the University of California,” to our knowledge, no such person from UCLA was consulted about the video prior to its release. Nevertheless, in furtherance of our educational and collaborative mission, we extend to you an invitation to engage with the American Indian Studies Center and the Los Angeles Indian community, as we see this unfortunate incident as presenting an opportunity for growth and mutual understanding.

We welcome an open dialogue and hope you will choose to engage with the Los Angeles Indian community, meet with our Native students and faculty, and/or support our work, which seeks to advance the cause of indigenous peoples everywhere.

Megwetch (Thank you),

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela R. Riley', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Angela R. Riley (Citizen Potawatomi Nation of Oklahoma)
Director, American Indian Studies Center
Professor of Law

¹ See, e.g., John Gast's "American Progress" (1872).

² *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, 435 U.S. 191 (1978). Though women and girls suffer higher incidences of sexualized crime in Native communities, such violence has dramatic, negative impacts on all Indian people and erodes the fabric of community for all.

³ Patricia Tjaden & Nancy Thoennes, US Department of Justice, Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women, 22 (2000) available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>.

⁴ Amnesty International, *Maze of Injustice: The Failure to Protect Indian Women from Sexual Violence in the USA*, Amnesty International, 2007, 27-39 (exploring the jurisdictional challenges hindering Native women's access to effective justice following sexual assault and other related crimes).

⁵ Steven W. Perry, U.S. Dept. of Just., American Indians and Crime: A BJS Statistical Profile, 1992- 2002 9-10 (Dec. 4, 2004) (available at <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/aic.pdf>).

⁶ <http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OJS/VictimServices?index.htm> (citing a 2003 Bureau of Justice Report).

⁷ S. REP. NO. 112-153 at 8 (2012).