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Open Letter: Michigan Tech University’s Racial Threat (from a Black Alumni)

On November 13, 2015 Michigan Tech University (MTU) made national news with the University of Missouri, Marist and a series of universities for racial threats targeted toward African American students on campus. As an African American Alumni of Michigan Technological University I felt the responsibility to respond. A 21-year-old Mechanical Engineering student named Matthew Allen Shultz from Norway posted in Yik Yak, ‘Gonna shoot all black people.’

For those who are unfamiliar with Michigan Tech let me paint a picture of the environment. MTU has an enrollment of about 7,000 students of which 82 students (1.1% of enrollment) are African American. Most African American students are from Southeastern Michigan (Detroit, Flint and Saginaw) and on a good day the school is a seven to nine hour drive when there is no snow. It is remotely located one hour from the tip of the Upper Peninsula so there are no short trips for their family to come to campus for a quick visit or in case of an emergency, so safety and peace of mind are critical.

I realize one student does not represent the sentiment of the majority of the campus, the school’s leadership or the local judicial system. The President of the University Glenn Mroz responded immediately, the African American students held a peaceful candle march and the student has been arraigned. However, the case is not closed. So, I urge all parties involved to continue working together to make Michigan Tech and the surrounding
community a safe environment where all students, staff, faculty and local residents can function without the fear of threat regardless of their color. Make no mistake Michigan Tech's ability to recruit and retain minority students (Black, African, Asian, etc.) hangs in the balance. The world is watching how this situation is handled.