

# Amherst College Drops 'Lord Jeff' as Mascot

By [Jess Bidgood](#) Jan. 26, 2016



A sign at Amherst College depicting Lord Jeffery Amherst, a colonial officer, handing blankets laced with smallpox to Native Americans. Nathaniel Brooks for The New York Times

AMHERST, Mass. — Lord Jeffery Amherst, the colonial-era military commander who gave this town its name, will no longer represent the prestigious liberal arts college here.

The trustees at [Amherst College](#) said on Tuesday that the institution would not use any references to Lord Jeffery, its unofficial mascot, in official communications or symbolism, and that it would find a new name for the

Lord Jeffery Inn, a campus hotel owned by the college. In a statement, the trustees also said that a group made up mostly of alumni and students would consider whether the college should adopt a new, and official, mascot.

"Amherst College finds itself in a position where a mascot — which, when you think about it, has only one real job, which is to unify — is driving people apart because of what it symbolizes to many in our community," wrote Cullen Murphy, the chairman of the board. But, he noted, the college would not try to impose its position on anyone else.

"Beyond that, people will do as they will," the statement said. "The college has no business interfering with free expression, whether spoken or written or, for that matter, sung. Period. We hope and anticipate that understanding and respect will run in all directions."

The debate over Lord Jeffery's role on campus erupted amid a series of controversies at colleges, municipalities and other institutions around the country over the use of historical figures, like slaveholders or Confederate battle figures; stereotypes, particularly about Native Americans; or symbols that some consider offensive.

Many students came to see Lord Jeff, as he is known here, as a symbol of white oppression for advocating that Native Americans be given smallpox-infected blankets to hasten their demise. The military commander, who led key British victories in the French and Indian War and for whom this town, and others in the Northeast, was named, wrote in a postscript to a letter in 1763: "You will do well to try to inoculate the Indians by means of blankets, as well as to try every other method that can serve to extirpate this execrable race."

The institution, which is one of the most diverse private colleges in the

nation, was encouraged to cut its ties with Lord Jeff, who came to be seen as an inappropriate symbol and offensive to many members of the student body.



The Lord Jeffery Inn, a campus hotel named after Lord Jeffery Amherst. The college said it would find a new name for the inn. Nathaniel Brooks for The New York Times

On Tuesday, students on campus, who had just returned from winter break, greeted the trustees' decision as a victory in the tug of war over tradition, change and inclusion at one of the nation's top private colleges.

"I think it's a big step in the right direction for our community," said Cornell Brooks, a freshman who is a member of the student government. "We're trying to be one of the most progressive schools in the country. The fact that our mascot was someone who represented such poor moral values — I really wasn't proud."

Micayla Tatum, a senior who is the head of the college's Native American Student Organization, said that the announcement was "symbolic of a new path," but that she thought it appeared to sanction alumni continuing to use the mascot. "I'm sure it will continue to show up at things like games," she said.

But it left some alumni seething, frustrated by what they saw as an affront to tradition and a rush to judgment on the legacy of a man who lived more than 250 years ago at a time of war.

"We think of ourselves as Jeffs, and we always will," said Donald MacNaughton, a member of the class of 1965.

Amherst College was founded in 1821, and was by all accounts named for its host town, not for Lord Jeffery Amherst. It was not until the early 20th century that Lord Jeff emerged as a campus symbol. He was the star of a beloved campus song, and while he was never made an official mascot, many of the sports teams are referred to on the field as the Jeffs or the Lord Jeffs, although administrators at the college say the athletic department no longer uses the Jeffs terminology and has endeavored to cycle the name off athletic gear.

The debate, which intensified in the spring of 2014 when some students proposed a moose as a new mascot, was met with warnings that there would be no end to the "political correctness" if the college officially distanced itself from Lord Jeffery.

But Mr. Murphy, the chairman of the trustees, said in his letter that was not so.

"The board would respond that you can find slippery slopes anywhere you look, that real life isn't a philosophy class or court of law, and that people

long ago figured out the common-sense way to deal with slippery slopes:  
Just draw the line," he wrote.