

# What's in a name? The need to nip NIPS

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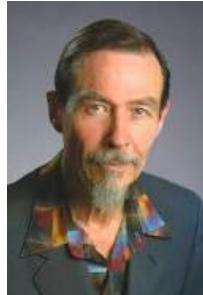
# Prelude: A Bit of History

It all starts at Caltech..

Caltech



John Hopfield



Carver Mead



Richard Feynman



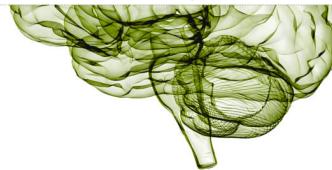
Ed Posner



Yaser Abu-Mostafa

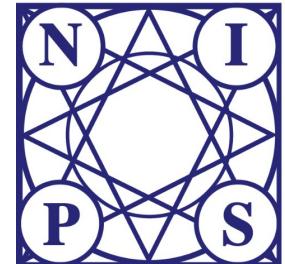
Computation &  
Neural Systems

1986



Neural Information  
Processing Systems

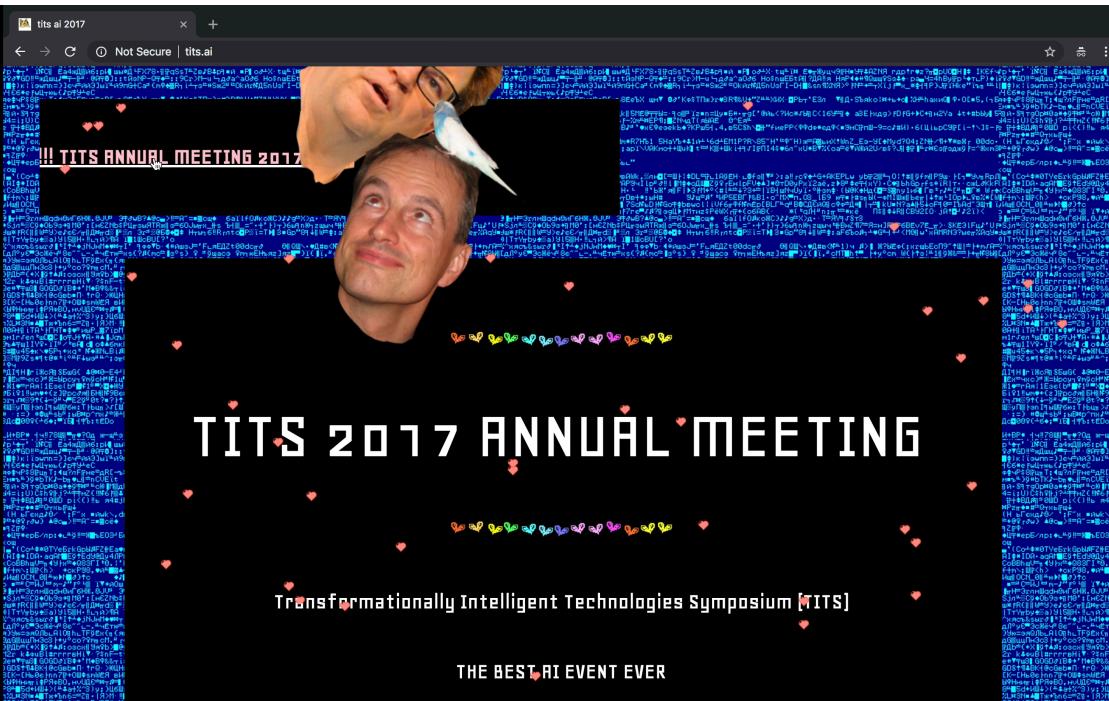
1987



# The Growth..



# Fast forward 2017..



**TITS AI @titsconference**  
thanks @elonmusk for shouting out  
about #tits2017 at the Tesla event  


# The Board considered the name change



**TITS AI**

@titsconference

Follow



offering to sell **tits.ai** for \$15k

**NIPS** @NipsConference

The NIPS executive board is currently discussing the possibility of changing the name of the NIPS conference. At the end of May, we will ask the whole NIPS community for input and suggestions for a potential new name. Please be patient until then.

# Historic racist connotation



**WIKIPEDIA**  
The Free Encyclopedia

Main page

Article   Talk

## *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips*

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

***Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips*** is a 1944 *Merrie Melodies* cartoon directed by [Friz Freleng](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

# The survey



- Sent to conference attendees in the last five years.
  - Biased sampling: didn't consider those who could not attend or had dropped out due to uncomfortable environment.
- 13% of those who completed survey self-reported as female.
  - Majority were asked on issues that affected the marginalized.
- Yes/no on name change.
  - Feeling of discomfort given equal weight as status quo.

# Non-change decision

“After extensive discussions, the [NIPS Board](#) has decided not to change the name of the conference *for now*. The poll itself did not yield a clear consensus on a name change or a well-regarded alternative name.”

"implement . . . concrete steps to improve the inclusiveness of the conference"

# The JHU Letter

Dear NIPS board members,

As researchers in machine learning and data science, we write as advocates of a welcoming and diverse machine learning community.

Recently, some disappointing behavior at NIPS 2017 has come to our attention, and has led one lab here to ban participation in NIPS 2018. We understand that steps are being taken to evaluate changes to the meeting in light of this behavior. In addition, the acronym of the conference is prone to unwelcome puns, such as the perhaps subversively named pre-conference “TITS” event and juvenile t-shirts such as “my NIPS are NP-hard”, that add to the hostile environment that many ML researchers have unfortunately been experiencing.

These incidents have brought up uncomfortable memories for some of us whose career paths have been affected by unwelcoming or harassing behavior. NIPS is at a time of significant expansion and change. We believe that serious actions are essential for the continuing health of the community.



Championed by  
Dr. Elana Fertig

# The Change.org Petition

change.org

Start a petition Browse Membership

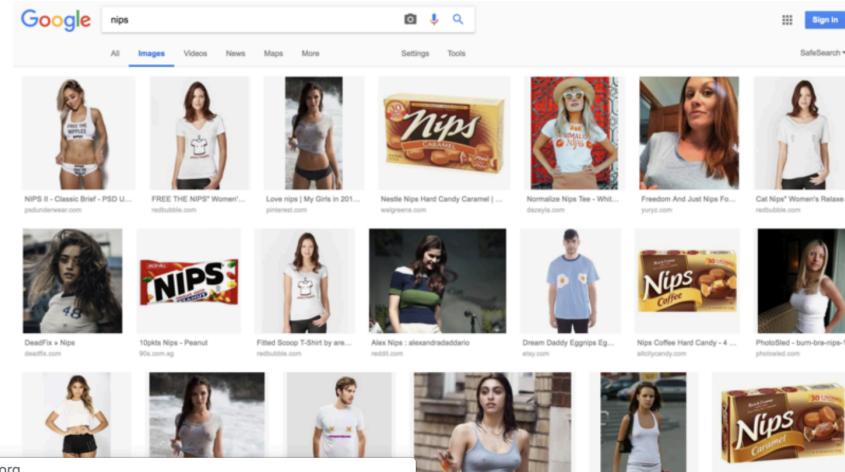


#ProtestNIPS: NIPS acronym encourages sexism and is a slur. Change the name

2K supporters

Petition details

## #ProtestNIPS: NIPS acronym encourages sexism and is a slur. Change the name



2,009 have signed. Let's get to 2,500!



Members of NIPS board:  
#ProtestNIPS: NIPS acronym...

Share on Facebook

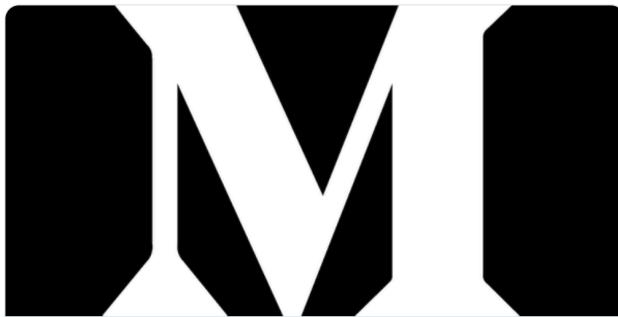
Send a Facebook message

# Positive Engagements on Social Media



Besmira Nushi @besanushi · Oct 25

The harm of harmless jokes by lu popolvuh [link.medium.com/ED96rR1ijR](https://link.medium.com/ED96rR1ijR)  
#ProtestNIPS #MeTooSTEM



**The harm of harmless jokes – lu popolvuh – Medium**  
A #MeTooSTEM story about requesting a change in tradition  
[link.medium.com](https://link.medium.com/ED96rR1ijR)



Caroline Werlang and 2 others liked



Geekette Bits™ @geekettebits · Oct 25

Talking to my 15 yr old daughter about @NipsConference & she immediately said we should #ProtestNIPS. She asked why it was named that, especially if it wasn't reflective of the field. Also asked why we don't learn about these women in history. Change NIPS & history 📸@ignotofsky



57

# Comments on Social Media

- Both men and women have nipples, so why is NIPS sexist?

I get that you are angry, but I'm surprised how much you are escalating this and forcing a confrontation. The decision was made by your colleagues, the recent program chairs, who are trying to do their best. I'm worried that relationships are going to be damaged. There will be an open meeting at NIPS; how do you want that to unfold?

# Comments on Social Media

Hi Anima,

if I may add points to what the other PhD student said:

- 1) Since I told my lab-mates (all are european PhD students) about black-in-AI, the name of the workshop is only brought to lunch discussions by them to mock the concept and/or to rant against the "new dictatorship of favouring minorities in Tech and Academia".

# Comments on Social Media

Hi Anima,

I'm a PhD student in the [REDACTED] I've been meaning to tell you -- I truly appreciate your courage to speak up for women in the ML community.

If I could, I would retweet and like your posts, and sign the #ProtestNIPS petition using my real name. Unfortunately I don't feel safe voicing my opinions because a few male colleagues, who have great influence on my career prospects, are strongly against the name change, and have warned everyone in my lab to not engage in these discussions. (For the same reason, please keep this email confidential.) I hope to be able to speak up one day, like you do, when I am further along in my academic career and have more power over my own career prospects.

I'm truly relieved and glad that we have people like you, who give me hope that change is coming. Anyway, thanks so much for your bravery and compassion for other minorities in the ML community. I hope we run into each other at a conference some day!

Best,

# In the media

**WIRED**

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AI Researchers Fight Over Four Letters: NIPS

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TOM SIMONITE BUSINESS 10.26.18 07:00 AM

## AI RESEARCHERS FIGHT OVER FOUR LETTERS: NIPS



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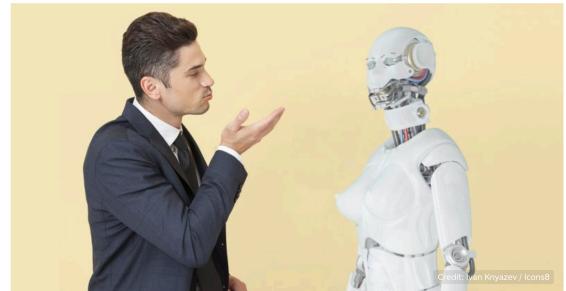
### AI conference widely known as 'NIPS' changes its controversial acronym

The major machine-learning meeting, now to be called NeurIPS, has faced increasing criticism over its name.

TDW LATEST HARD FORK PLUGGED THE NEXT POLICE IOT LAB INVESTING 2.0  
Win a free ticket to our blockchain event! →

### 'NIPS' AI conference renamed after 30 years over complaints of sexism

by VISHWAM SANHARAN — 15 days ago in ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



# Comments Continue..



**Emanuele Lapponi** @emanlapponi · Dec 5

On today's [#just2018things](#): [@sapinker](#) using the [#protestNIPS](#) success to flirt with JP readers.



Yes he has a new book out.

**Steven Pinker** ✅ @sapinker

Case study 1: Long-running conference called Neural Information Processing Symposium forced to change its acronym from ‘NIPS’ because some thought it was sexist. ????? [nature.com/articles/d4158...](http://nature.com/articles/d4158...)



THANK YOU