

Nobel-linked Swedish institute seeks distance from racist past

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The Swedish body housing the committee that awards the Nobel Prize in medicine on Tuesday said it will rename some buildings and a street named after racialist or pro-Nazi scientists.

The rector of the prestigious Karolinska Institute in Stockholm said a room, a building and a [street](#) bearing the names of Anders Retzius (1796-1860) and his son Gustaf (1842-1919) would be renamed.

"They espoused values that are not in concordance with the [core values](#) that we as a university should adhere to," Ole Petter Ottersen said in an online video.

The elder Retzius is best known for the "cephalic index", a measure of [skull](#) proportions that is a source of racist hierarchies.

Retzius, whose racially based theories on anatomy were continued by his son, claimed people with "elongated" skulls were superior to those with "short" ones.

These theories, for which the institute houses a large collection of skulls, later fed into the "racial hygiene" promoted by the Nazis.

The Karolinska Institute is also asking the city of Solna, near Stockholm, to rename "von Euler Street" to "Ulf von Euler Street", the 1970 Nobel Prize winner in chemistry.

This is to distinguish him from his father, Hans von Euler, a 1929 Nobel Prize winner in chemistry who was an active member of a Swedish-German organisation that became pro-Nazi.

The decision, expected late Tuesday, is the result of recent debate on the historical legacy of the institute, initiated mostly by students.

These debates had already resulted in the return of skulls, mainly from [indigenous peoples](#), to Finland, French Polynesia, North America and Australia.

"This is the debate we need to have. How should we otherwise ensure that we do not fall into the same traps... We need to be reminded of the dark chapters of the past," Ottersen said.

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