



# Harvard's Secret Court: The Savage 1920 Purge of Campus Homosexuals

*William Wright*

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In 2002, a researcher for The Harvard Crimson came across a restricted archive labeled "Secret Court Files, 1920." The mystery he uncovered involved a tragic scandal in which Harvard University secretly put a dozen students on trial for homosexuality and then systematically and persistently tried to ruin their lives.

In May of 1920, Cyril Wilcox, a freshman suspended from Harvard, was found sprawled dead on his bed, his room filled with gas--a suicide. The note he left behind revealed his secret life as part of a circle of (cut "young") homosexual students. The resulting witch hunt and the lives it cost remains one of the most shameful episodes in the history of America's premiere university. Supported by legendary Harvard President Lawrence Lowell, Harvard conducted its investigation in secrecy. Several students committed suicide; others had their lives destroyed by an ongoing effort on the part of Harvard to destroy their reputations. Harvard's Secret Court is a deeply moving indictment of the human toll of intolerance and the horrors of injustice that can result when a powerful institution loses its balance.

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