

↓ *Eppie Lederer*

July 18, 1960

Miss Abigail Van Buren
Number 10 Summer Holm Place
Hillsborough, California

Dear Miss Van Buren:

A proper answer to your question about cousin marriages would require a rather extensive analysis of a number of issues besides scientific ones. Dr. Curt Stern at Berkeley has devoted an entire chapter to consanguinity in his excellent book on human genetics; the book by Sheldon Read, "Counseling in Medical Genetics," has a possibly less scholarly, more dogmatic and perhaps easily understandable and brief account.

In the long run, consanguineous marriage probably has little social effect since such marriages do not generate new detrimental genes but only hasten the expression of such genes that are already being carried in various lines of the human germ plasm. From the standpoint of the individual couple, it should perhaps be noted, according to several very rough estimates, that consanguineous marriage approximately doubles the risk of the appearance of an hereditary abnormality as compared with random matings. Where a specific, recessive, hereditary abnormality is known to be segregating in the kindreds, there will be, of course, a much more specific risk of this appearing in the fruits of a consanguineous union.

I certainly would not advocate legislation to prevent such marriages in this state without careful study of all its implications; certainly we can think of many more justifiable bases for limiting parenthood! However, a couple of related individuals who are contemplating marriage should certainly inform themselves of the genetic principles that apply. I should say that Dr. Stern's professional specialty is much closer to this field than is my own.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor and Executive
Department of Genetics

Van Buren