

## Why this should matter to you!

The first laws prohibiting first cousin marriage came about only 150 years ago, and were largely politically motivated. Fearing rapid assimilation of immigrants, legislators sought to restrict cousin marriages among foreigners. Empirical medical studies in the early 20th century were state and federally funded, and exaggerated the risks to cousins.

By supporting government's interference in the fundamental right to marry and reproduce, America risks further intrusions into the rights of individuals based on nothing more than the fickle mind of public opinion. Our children are taught to continue the tradition of discrimination and bigotry. Understanding of genetics is restricted, stunting the acceptance of medical research and advancement.

Whether you support or oppose legislative prohibitions on cousin marriage, we encourage you to voice your opinion through our online survey.

## Cousins United to Defeat Discriminating Laws Through Education

### Volunteer Staff

#### **Christie Schuler Smith**

*Founder / President*

#### **Mark Smith**

*Vice President*

#### **Susanne Gordon**

*Canadian Director of Operations*

#### **Jessie Woodard Jr.**

*Asst. Director U.S. Operations*

### Consultants:

#### **Robin Bennett**

*MS, CGC*

#### **Amy Jill Strickland**

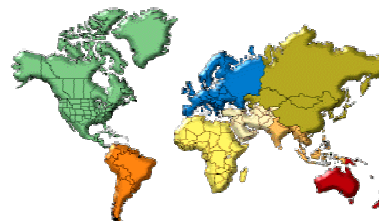
*RCC Canon Lawyer*

#### **Martin Ottenheimer**

*Professor of Anthropology K.S.U.,  
author of Forbidden Relatives: The  
American Myth of Cousin Marriage*

Consultants are not official representatives of C.U.D.D.L.E. International. Their voluntary and informal assistance serves only to ensure accuracy of the information we provide.

C.U.D.D.L.E. International is a privately funded organization.



Copyright 2002  
[www.cuddleinternational.org](http://www.cuddleinternational.org)

## Cousins United to Defeat Discriminating Laws through Education



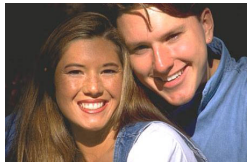
[www.cuddleinternational.org](http://www.cuddleinternational.org)

The key to tolerance  
Is understanding

## Should cousin marriage be illegal?

### Historical parallel:

For nearly 250 years, bi-racial marriages were illegal in some areas. A union between an African American and a Caucasian individual was considered immoral, and thought to corrupt the gene pool.



**An estimated one out of every 1000 marriages in the U.S. is between first cousins.**

In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court abolished interracial marriage bans, declaring them unconstitutional because:

- The "freedom to marry" belongs to all people.
- Marriage is one of our "vital personal rights"
- The right to marry is "essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by a free people".

According to a national survey by The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University, only 45% of white Americans would support the idea of a close relative marrying an African American.

In a recent poll on the NY Times Magazine website, only 35% of respondents support legislative prohibitions against cousin marriage. An additional 12% had no opinion.

On a survey at C.U.D.D.L.E. International, 82% of respondents not in a cousin relationship acknowledged a change of opinion after becoming educated on the issue.

### Is it genetically dangerous?

While there is a slight (appx. 2.8%) increase for recessive genetic disorders in the children of first cousins, the same risk may apply to a couple who share the same ethnic origin. Recessive conditions, however, are the least common contributor of birth defects. A genetic counselor can help couples to assess their risk potential.

Essentially, the argument of genetic risks is an issue of reproductive rights. Just as couples with known hereditary disorders, or whose lifestyle or fertility options pose additional risks enjoy the freedom of making informed choices, so should cousin couples.

### Putting it in perspective:

The following risk factors are approximate, and may be influenced by other factors.

- Carriers of dominant or X-linked gene disorders: 50%
- Conception beyond age 35: 30+%
- Conception during early teens: 9%
- Invitro fertilization: 9%



**Despite a slightly elevated risk, the vast majority of child-bearing cousin couples are able to raise families with no mental or physical disabilities.**

### Are cousin marriages immoral?

Morality is most often associated with religious beliefs, and therefore has no place in our legal system. Still, the question begs to be answered.

The tenets of almost every major world religion upholds the sanctity of cousin marriages. Even the Roman Catholic church, which forbids cousin unions, acknowledges that the prohibition is an order of the church, and is not based on scripture. Because of this, the church allows for couples to apply for dispensation from the church law. Hinduism is the only other major religion which expressly forbids first cousin marriage.



### The real issue:

Clearly, cousin marriage should not be a medical, moral, or even a legal issue. It is, however, an issue of discrimination. If couples are prohibited from marriage and reproduction based on social distaste and disapproval, then we risk becoming a society which interferes with the rights of all individuals.

Rather than forbidding cousins to marry, we should be educating them about the availability of genetic counseling, and respecting their freedom of choice.