

Address to the inaugural opening of the Multicultural Canada website at Simon Fraser University May 31, 2008. Nick Noorani, Publisher, The Canadian Immigrant.

Thank you for inviting me to share the launch of SFU Library's Multicultural Canada digital resource.

Learning our history helps us not to repeat past mistakes!

For the last five years, I have been trying to bridge the gap across ethnic communities in Vancouver and Canada. My magazine, the Canadian Immigrant, strives to feature immigrants of all ethnicities, all backgrounds and all colours.

What we've noticed in speaking to thousands of immigrants in the last few years is that underneath all our traditions, languages, cultures and perspectives, we are all essentially the same.

An immigrant, be they from India or France, will face the same emotions as they land in Canada, the same disappointments and the same joys. Yet, there is still a lingering ethnic divide in our communities. You see some ethnic groups keeping to themselves, rather than integrating into the larger Canadian community. You see the broader mainstream population not truly understanding the depth of historical involvement of multicultural communities in Canada, from the thousands of Chinese who were some of the first British Columbians, to the mistreatment of groups like the Japanese and First Nations.

We are a nation built on diversity and multiculturalism, and this can pose some challenges, but the first step in overcoming them is sharing knowledge and understanding, starting in the schools to the community at large.

SFU's Multicultural Canada online program will be a great resource and tool to further bridge the cultural divide between all Canadians — ethnic communities, Canadian-born and First Nations.

The role of ethnic media in Canada is enormous. The pioneers who created these publications linked homesick immigrants through the centuries. They helped make new Canadians feel at home by connecting people.

The library features archives relating to the Chinese, Ukrainian, German, Hungarian, Indian and Vietnamese communities and their journey in Canada. It is my fervent hope that this will be expanded in time to cover most of Canada's 200 ethnic groups. This is not just for people from those groups but for all Canadians to study and understand their neighbour!