From the moment Spaniards -- or was it Vikings? -- first dropped anchor and encountered the natives whom the Spanish called Indians (because they thought they had landed in India), the land now known as America has been a multicultural place. And of course it's much more so today. Just check out our faces and dialects and music.

And our signs -- in English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and more. Well, maybe it's Chinese.

Mandarin Chinese characters, called Hanzi, are hot right now. They're a popular decoration on clothing and artwork and tattoos.

But as Tian Tang, a young Chinese American who's a graduate student at Arizona State University, points out on his Internet website, Hanzismatter.com, an awful lot of these characters are just plain wrong. Some are not even Chinese at all, but pretty little ink strokes that sort of look Chinese.

Mr. Tang's site shows us a colorful shirt decorated with a powerful, leaping tiger. Next to the beast are nine Chinese characters. But they translate into gibberish -- words like unicorn and chicken and superficial. Not one of the characters has anything to do with tigers, or even cats.

Other Hanzi, delicately tattooed onto a woman's back, translate as crazy diarrhea. Surely this wasn't what she ordered from the tattoo artist.

So, America is a multicultural melting pot. But reading the signs doesn't always tell you who you're melting with.
Archive

The American Affection for Collection

For the longest time, humans have collected things, just for fun. Butterflies. Buttons. Thimbles. And coats of arms. It's not just an American thing, of course, but we go a little nuts with it. We know someone who searches out beer bottles. Not cans, which are more commonly collected and stacked against a wall. Bottles. He says their shapes and colorful labels are more interesting than a bunch of ordinary cans. This all started when he tossed a single empty beer...

Archive

Ten Commandments Monuments Tied to 1956 Film

This summer, the U-S Supreme Court is expected to rule on two cases involving the public display of the biblical Ten Commandments. Christians, Jews, and Muslims believe that God gave Moses ten rules of behavior for mankind. Sometimes called the Decalogue, the commandments have been recorded and reprinted millions of times. But ever since God's laws showed up in U.S. public buildings, passions have been stirred, as they were in 2003, when an Alabama judge...

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Merger Mania Devours Legendary Shopping Palaces

Peer into the future for a minute. Could it be that, 100 years from now, every American who has a job will be working at just one of two
places: for the government, or for the one and only private corporation left in the country?...

Archive

Alaska Zoo to Build Elephant Treadmill for 4,100-Kilo Maggie

It's not just the circus where elephants are in the spotlight these days. America's zoos are paying extra-close attention to these gigantic mammals as well. Highly social elephants need a lot of room, for obvious reasons. And the recent death of Peaches, a...