The United States may soonfortib its border with Mexico. But what about thefence that is already there? A close look at the disjointed, makeshift barrier reveals America's ambivalent and conflicted attitudes

toward immigration. I By Peter Skerry

he United States is in the midst of an
intense debate over its borders. Imrni-
gration is approaching historic lev-
els, and an all-time high of 12 million

people-one third of B in the United States illegally. Fifty percent

of
them are from Mexico, and another 30 percent are from elsewhere in Central and South America. Most have entered across the 1,950-mile

smack of foruhcation and militarization by empire- concerned about protecting plant and wildlife habitats. building Washington bureaucrats. Meanwhile, market- Faced with so many paaies capable of delaying or even oriented conservatives at the Wall Street Jouml and stopping construction, the fence's political sponsors human rights activists at the American Civil Liberties were determined to drive stakes into the ground as Union have both denounced the border fence as a quickly as possible. Fdy, there was the Border Patrol new "Berlin Wall"-though its purpose is to keep itself. As scores of interviews reveal, this agency did not foreign nationals out, not citizens in.
1; this controversy, few have
bothered to consider the mundane,

physical details of the border fence The remote, often forbidding U.S.-Mexico border

itself. But when one looks at it

closely, one encounters neither a has become the focus of a symbolic struggle over
particularly imposing structure nor
a gold-plated military project.

[How Not to Build a Fence]

The No-Offense Fence
America's border with Mexico isn't marked

fence points toward the United
States, so as not to offend Mexico.

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stands up to flash flooding. L

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orth
ofthe primary fence, which allows plenty of
space for vehicles to maneuver in between.
It's made of steel mesh, so the Border Patrol
can see what's on the other side. And
though the secondary fence is 15 feet high,
ironically its flange serves as an excellent
stage for those helping others across. of2 484.781 81.18806 2m (2198]>> -0.i4.4