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seasons: drought, flood, blizzard and twist-
er. This summer 97% of the state was in a
dominant drought; in 2011 the Dallas–Fort
Worth area experienced 40 straight days in
July and August of temperatures of 100°F or
higher. The state's social services are thin.
Welfare benefits are skimpy. Roughly a
quarter of residents have no health insur-
ance. Many of its schools are less than stel-
lar. Property-crime rates are high. Rates of
murder and other violent crimes are hardly
sterling either. A recent report from the FBI
found that the home state of Chuck Norris
led the nation as the place the most people
got punched or kicked to death in 2012.

So why are more Americans moving to
Texas than to any other state?

Texas has acquired a certain cool fac-
tor recently. The pundits Marshall Witt-
mann has called it "America's America," the
place where Americans go when they
need a fresh start. The state's ethnic and
cultural diversity has made places like
Austin and Marfa into magnets for art-
ists and other bohemians.

But I believe the real reason Americans
are heading to Texas is much simpler. As
an economist and a libertarian, I have be-
come convinced that whether they know
it or not, these migrants are being pushed
(and pulled) by the major economic forces
that are reshaping the American econo-
my as a whole: the hollowing out of the
middle class, the increased costs of liv-
ing in the U.S.'s established population
centers and the resulting search by many
Americans for a radically cheaper way to
live and do business.

One of these pioneers is Casey Colando.
When he was just 19, he bought—sight
unseen—five acres of Big Bend mountain
desert country in Texas as an investment.
It was just $300 an acre, far away from cul-
turally and geographically from his na-
tive upstate New York. Four years later,
in 2008, Colando moved to his homestead
in the magnificent but remote region of
West Texas.

A graduate of the State University of
New York at Canton, where he studied
alternative energy, Colando now lives
with his wife Sara some 80 miles from
the nearest town (Alpine, pop. 6,000).
The couple bought more land adjoining
their original property, and they run an
alternative-energy business that serves
various settlers who have moved to this
isolated corner of Texas—helping their
neighbors eschew what Colando calls "the
dead electric company" and live off the grid
by installing solar and wind power.

Colando says he first tried to launch
his alternative-energy business in up-
state New York. "It was difficult work for a
small business there," he says. "The costs
were higher, and there were fewer busi-
ness opportunities, more regulations. So I
came out West, and I haven't looked back."

To a lot of Americans, Texas feels like
the future. And I would argue that more
than any other state, Texas looks like the
future as well—offering us a glimpse of
what's to come for the country at large in
the decades ahead. The U.S. is experienc-
ing ever greater economic inequality and
the thinning of its middle class; Texas is
already one of our most unequal states.
America's safety net is fraying under the
weight of ballooning Social Security and
Medicare costs; Texas' safety net was built
frayed. Americans are seeking a cheaper
cost of living and a less regulated climate
in which to do business; Texas has those
in spades. And did we mention there's no
state income tax? (Texas is one of only sev-
en states in the union that lack the levy.)

There's a bumper sticker sometimes
seen around the state that proclaims,
I WASN'T BORN IN TEXAS, BUT I GOT HERE
AS FAST AS I COULD. As the U.S. heads
toward Texas, literally and metaphor-
ically, it's worth understanding why we're
headed there—both to see the pitfalls
ahead and to catch a glimpse of the op-
opportunities that await us if we make the
journey in an intelligent fashion.

AVERAGE IS OVER
THE FIRST THING TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT
OUR MORE TEXAN FUTURE IS WHAT'S HAPPEN-
ING TO THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE ON THE
WHOLE: AVERAGE IS OVER.

More and more workers are leaving
the middle class—headed both up and down—and fewer workers are moving into it.
Median household income has fallen about 5%
since the Great Recession ended in 2009; in
that same period, 58% of job growth was in
lower-wage occupations, defined as those
paying $13.83 an hour or less.

However, it's not that incomes are
stagnant generally. Earners at the top
done very well—but the gains have
been distributed quite unevenly. Last year
the top 1% of earners took home 19.3% of
household income, their largest share