Part of my charge as the first state historian of Texas is to encourage the teaching of Texas history in public schools, but we need to examine the way history is taught. Though the dramatic stories of the Texas Revolution and cattle ranching give rise to romantic and patriotic feelings, they leave huge gaps in the understanding of why Texas is what it is today.

More than 8 million Texans are of Hispanic origin, yet our schools largely ignore the two centuries Texas was under the rule of Spain and Mexico. Textbooks focus on the arrival of settlers from the United States, but, for many Texans, the heritage from south of the Rio Grande is one to which they can better relate. Additionally, numerous legal, economic and cultural practices of today's Texas have roots dating from the Spanish colonial period.

Only 1 percent of our population lives on farms and ranches, but much of the rest of Texas history that is taught concerns the state as an agricultural society. We need to reorient our presentation to include more of the state's 20th-century urbanization and industrialization of. The sweeping social and economic changes that have made us predominantly a state of city-dwellers, from the Civil Rights Movement to the space race, require changes not only in what we teach but in how we teach.

While we shift our focus to make the study of history relevant to our youths, what is missing in the textbooks can be found online. With just a few clicks of a mouse, our students — and anyone connected to the Internet — can find just about anything they want to know about Texas. In fact, computer users from throughout the world access 4 million pages of historical information each month, courtesy of the Texas State Historical Association and its Handbook of Texas Online. Now into its second century of existence, the "Oldest Learned Society in Texas" is embracing the Internet full-throttle. In addition to the 24,000 articles in The Handbook of Texas Online, the Texas State Historical Association will soon post the 54,000 pages from its century-old Southwestern Historical Quarterly.

For today's youths, a computer mouse is a natural extension of the hand. Until all of our schools embrace the entire rich and diverse story of Texas, the best way to share our historical heritage and values, as well as lessons learned from mistakes, might be to plug them into the best part of the Internet.

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