

William Edward Leuchtenburg
Doctor of Humane Letters

William Leuchtenburg, William Rand Kenan Jr. professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is one of the country's most eminent historians and among the most distinguished scholars ever to serve on our faculty.

Leuchtenburg received his B.A. at Cornell University (1943) and his Ph.D. at Columbia University (1951), focusing on modern American history. He taught at Columbia from 1952 to 1982, where he developed a national reputation as a leading expert on the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt. His classic book on this subject, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932–1940" (1963), received the prestigious Bancroft Prize and the Francis Parkman Prize. He also published numerous articles, monographs and textbooks during his years at Columbia, establishing his position as a leading expert on America's complex, evolving political history. Subsequently, the Society of American Historians designated Leuchtenburg to be the first recipient of the Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. Award for distinguished writing in American history of enduring public significance.

After joining Carolina's faculty in 1982, he continued to pursue his historical research and writing, which led to a stream of highly acclaimed books, including: "In the Shadow of FDR" (1989); "The Supreme Court Reborn" (1996); and "The American President: From Teddy Roosevelt to Bill Clinton" (2015). In 2007 Gov. Mike Easley bestowed on Leuchtenburg the North Carolina Award for Literature.

He has been a visiting professor at Harvard, Cornell, William and Mary and other American universities, and held the Harmsworth chair at Oxford University. He is the only scholar to have served as president of the Society of American Historians (1978–1981), the Organization of American Historians (1985–1986) and the American Historical Association (1991).

He has also been deeply engaged with public debates on contemporary issues by appearing on countless TV and radio shows, writing articles for newspapers and giving interviews to reporters. On several occasions, he served as presidential election analyst for NBC, and, in covering presidential inaugurations, he appeared at the anchor desk for three national networks. He has also collaborated with Ken Burns on documentary films, including the 1994 miniseries on baseball, one of his enduring passions. Their most recent joint ventures were "The Roosevelts" and "Country Music." He is currently historical consultant to Burns on four films in progress: "Benjamin Franklin," "The American Revolution," "Martin Luther King" and "Lyndon Johnson."