

2018 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

# Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

◆ Michelle Obama ◆

## Mary Hatwood Futrell Award



With poise, intellect and grace Michelle Obama has been a role model to women and girls across this country and around the world. As the first African-American First Lady of the United States, she redefined the traditional role of FLOTUS by intentionally focusing her attention on advancing opportunities for women and girls in education, equal access, and health nationwide.

Michelle Obama learned the value of education from her parents who raised her in a working class neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. Mrs. Obama shared, "My parents didn't have much money, and they never went to college themselves, but they had an unwavering belief in the power of education, and they always pushed me and my brother to do whatever it took to succeed in school."

Michelle understood the doors that could be opened for women by having access to education. A product of Chicago public schools, she went on to Princeton University, where she graduated cum laude and from there to Harvard Law School. After college, Obama went from a career in corporate law to pursue public service; working in a variety of roles including as an assistant to Mayor Richard Daley, as the assistant commissioner of planning and development for the City of Chicago and in Chicago office of Public Allies, a nonprofit leadership-training program that helped young adults develop skills for future careers in the public sector.

As First Lady, Obama led initiatives like Let's Move to address childhood obesity, Reach Higher which encouraged students to complete education past high school and Joining Forces, a nationwide effort calling on all Americans to rally around service members, veterans and their families and support them through wellness education and employment opportunities. But the greatest contribution to women and girls globally was her collaboration with the President on the Let Girls Learn Initiative.

Using the platform she had as First Lady, Michelle Obama launched the Let Girls Learn Initiative, which invested in new efforts to expand educational opportunities for girls globally—including in areas of conflict and crisis. The initiative expanded collaborations with experts and placed particular emphasis on community-led solutions to help adolescent girls complete their education.

Obama spoke passionately about her belief in the initiative saying, "We know that when we give these girls the chance to learn, they will seize it. ... We also know that educating girls doesn't just transform their life prospects -- it transforms the prospects of their families, communities, and nations as well."

An eloquent and thoughtful leader, First Lady Michelle Obama directed the power of her office to drive initiatives and influence government programs to champion progress for women and girls in the United States and across the globe.