

press release

*Episode description*

***AIR: AMERICA'S INVESTIGATIVE REPORTS***

**Episode 101, "Crisis Mismanagement"**

Well before Hurricane Katrina made its deadly landfall in August 2005, any journalist who had reported on New Orleans' storm-readiness knew the city was ripe for calamity. But no one could have predicted that the Federal Emergency Management Agency's response to Katrina would so compound the winds and flooding that it would quickly come to be considered a national disaster in and of itself.

No one, that is, except a team of reporters from the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*.

Beginning in October 2004, these investigators from the Fort Lauderdale newspaper spent more than a year documenting and reporting on problems with FEMA in a series called "FEMA: A Legacy of Waste." It was the story of their lives, one that would be short-listed for a Pulitzer Prize. And it alerted readers to the fact that the federal government was unlikely to be ready for "the Big One."

In its 15-month investigation, the *Sun-Sentinel* revealed that FEMA had awarded more than \$530 million to applicants across the U.S. who had little or no hardship following the 2004 hurricane season. The four-person team of reporters, working with the paper's investigations editor, detailed how tax money bought furniture and appliances for citizens in areas untouched by hurricanes, fires, floods or tornados. The *Sun-Sentinel* also revealed how FEMA inspectors received little training and that some of the inspectors hired by FEMA had criminal records. The investigation led to indictments, a U.S. Senate hearing, a federal audit, and changes in the way FEMA processes claims. The paper even called in an editorial for the resignation of then-FEMA director Michael Brown, long before "Brownie, you're doing a heckuva job" became an ironic national punch line.

*AIR* traces the journalists' work in reporting this riveting story as they learned more and more about how ineptly the agency functioned. Viewers will learn how Brown paid the *Sun-Sentinel* reporters a visit after the first story ran to deny that there were problems at the agency; how the newspaper had to sue FEMA to obtain thousands of records which showed the problems were even worse than imagined; and how a local investigation would presage a national disaster in the making.

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