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## Commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Jamestown with *The River Where America Began*

March 2007, 336 pgs

\$24.95 Cloth

0-7425-5172-5

978-0-7425-5172-5

Washington, D.C. — This May marks the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first permanent English settlement in America at Jamestown, and *The River Where America Began: A Journey Along the James* is the biography of the river that witnessed it all.

The James River, which runs through roughly the middle of Virginia, is not only one of the largest rivers contained in a single state, but is the most historic waterway in America. **The River Where America Began** tells the story of the nation as written along the river's shores.

That story, of the beginnings of a diverse and democratic nation, is told by a cast that ranges from Pocahontas to Jefferson, from Lincoln to Lee, each of whom played their part in the shaping of the country along the banks of the James River.

More than a rich survey of the river's history, **The River Where America Began** connects the modern landscape to the past in a way that both resonates with today's readers and provokes new reflections on who we are and where we've come from as Americans.

### About the Author

**Bob Deans** is a national correspondent for Cox Newspapers. A Virginia native, he started out in the news business when he was ten years old, delivering his hometown paper, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. In 1992 Deans moved to Washington DC, where he has covered foreign policy, national security, economic affairs, and the White House. He was president of the White House Correspondents Association from 2002–2003, and he now lives in Bethesda, Maryland, with his wife and their three children.

Please visit the book's website at [www.theriverwhereamericabegan.com](http://www.theriverwhereamericabegan.com)

**For more information or to schedule an interview with Bob Deans, please contact Jasmine Zick at 301-459-3366 x5628 or email [jzick@rowman.com](mailto:jzick@rowman.com).**

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Dear Journalist/Producer,

As you plan your coverage of the **May visit of Queen Elizabeth** to commemorate the **400th Anniversary** of the first permanent English settlement in America - at **Jamestown** in 1607 - **author Bob Deans** can provide the color, anecdote and perspective that help give your reports the added dimension that ties the Jamestown story to modern themes of national identity and American purpose.

His new book, *The River Where America Began: A Journey Along the James* (March, 2007, 236 pages, Rowman & Littlefield) tells the powerful story of how three ancient peoples - **African, English and Native American** - first came together at Jamestown to forge the tortured beginnings of **a new civilization that would change the world.**

Drawing on the latest scholarship and the most authoritative historical and contemporary voices, Deans' insightful and riveting narrative brings to life compelling characters like **Powhatan** and his favorite daughter, the Algonquin princess, **Pocahontas**, as well as **John Smith, John Rolfe** and their fellow settlers. He explains Jamestown's beginnings at the dawn of **British empire** as an investment play by early venture capitalists who bought shares in the **Virginia Company of London**. He vividly depicts the issues, both profound and mundane, that led to the establishment at Jamestown of the **first democratic body in the Western Hemisphere** - still functioning as the Virginia General Assembly. And he tells the unsettling back story behind the arrival, just three weeks later, of the **first African slaves in English America.**

"The story is ugly in places. Seldom is it fully just or fair," Deans writes. "And yet, this American cradle has not only endured; it has been redeemed, through the long-running drama that ties Native American dreams to European ambitions and the power of African people who came to this country in chains and somehow kept faith through the long nightmare of slavery with their unfathomable will to be free."

Deans' 15 years as a Washington correspondent include coverage of national security, economic policy and foreign affairs. He covered the White House for eight years and was elected president of the White House Correspondents' Association 2002-2003. He has appeared on NPR, ABC, CNN, Fox News, C-SPAN and other television and radio broadcasts, and is a national correspondent for Cox Newspapers.

Attached is a list of Jamestown-related questions and answers Deans addresses in his book, as well as the transcript of a conversation with Deans. For further information or to book Deans for an interview, **contact Rowman & Littlefield publicist Jasmine Zick at [JZick@rowman.com](mailto:JZick@rowman.com) or (301) 459-3366 x5628.**

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### Questions and Answers

The Jamestown story is the original tale of the making of America. It has heightened relevance today, as the country struggles to refine its identity and redefine its purpose in a world wracked by terror and fundamentalist rage. What does Jamestown tell us about who we are as a diverse and dynamic democracy? What does it say about the perils of culture clashes poorly understood? And how do the myths and memories of Jamestown help to shape modern day notions about what it is to be an American?

Here are some questions addressed in the new book, *The River Where America Began: A Journey Along the James*, with each subject followed by a passage taken verbatim from the book itself.

Q. How long had Native Americans roamed Virginia before the English arrived, how many Indians were there in Virginia when Jamestown was settled and how much did they depend upon the river system the English settlers occupied?

A. Native Americans were using Virginia's James River 15,000 years before the English arrived, recent archaeological evidence affirms. Archaeologists believe some 25,000 native Americans may have lived in Virginia in 1607, though others contend the number may have been higher. They built a rich and highly organized civilization along the spine of the James River.

Verbatim: *The river - or yeokanta, as the Powhatan Indians called it - was both the giver and taker of life, a fickle and genuinely mysterious mistress whose capricious ways could be learned and even predicted, but, ultimately, never tamed. It was the source of water, provider of food, deliverer of fertile soil, the trunk line of transport and travel and trade, a hallowed and living being, honored, and perhaps even worshipped, by people for whom life without it would have been unimaginable. It was, quite simply, the beating heart of their world.*  
(page 13)

Q. Who was the most powerful leader in Virginia when the English arrived in 1607?

A. Wahunsenacawh, known to the English as Powhatan, was born in a hilltop village at present-day Richmond, overlooking the falls of the James River. By 1607, he presided over a chiefdom called *Tsenacomoco*, taking in some 14,000 people in an area that spanned the eastern third of present-day Virginia.

Verbatim: *As chief, Powhatan was a force unto himself, the final arbiter on matters of state, with the power to levy tribute, make war and render judgment as to innocence or guilt, even to the point of sentencing offenders to death...All of that, and more, would soon be tested by a strange and foreign foe. It came out of the east on the wings of the wind, in the time the cheawanta sang, unforeseen by any shaman, unfortold but by the tides, gliding against the sunlit current, pressing ever further upstream, over the river's ancient and outstretched waters, the sacred arms of yeokanta.* (pages 29 and 33)

Q. Who was Pocahontas, what was her relationship to Capt. John Smith and how important of a character was she historically?

A. The favorite daughter of Powhatan's, Pocahontas was a remarkable woman who was, at a minimum, a close ally and probably soul mate to Smith, who wrote that she twice saved his life and . It's hard to imagine that Jamestown would have survived without her.

*Verbatim: Doubtless the old chief noticed that his daughter had impressed Smith, who wrote that Pocahontas "not only for feature, countenance and proportion, much exceedeth any of the rest of his people, but for wit and spirit, the only Nonpareil of his country." Hardly a Shakespearean love sonnet, that line nonetheless appears to be the most favorable personal reference to a female in the voluminous canon of Smith's autobiographical writings. (page 76)*

Q. What was the "Starving Time," how many settlers died, and how did Jamestown survive it?

A. During the winter of 1609-10, a lackluster harvest, sour Indian relations and poor leadership led to famine in Jamestown, with starving settlers eating rats, boiling shoe leather and ultimately resorting to cannibalism to survive. Some 500 colonists were there in autumn; by spring all but 60 were dead. Jamestown was given up for failure and, in fact, abandoned - but only, as fate would have it, for 24 hours. As dispirited deserters headed down river in hopes of returning to London, they were met by reinforcements and a new leader who ordered them all to return to the site of their ghastly ordeal.

*Verbatim: The horses were the first to go, killed and butchered for their meat, followed by the town's dogs, cats, rats and mice, probably in that order. When the pack animals, pets and vermin were gone, the colonists boiled their boots and chewed the leather. Some ventured beyond the palisades, risking death by Indian snipers, to forage for nuts and dig for roots...How hungry does a man have to be to feed on the flesh of a rotting corpse? With grim echoes of the Spanish survival tales buried deep in their conscience, the colonists found out, digging up bodies from shallow graves with whispered prayers for their daily bread. (page 95)*

Q. How did tobacco save Jamestown, what did King James think of it and how did it lead to the first Anglo-American marriage on record?

A. Learning from the Indians, Colonist John Rolfe helped develop the first cash crop in English America, cultivating a strain of tobacco that grew well in the Virginia riverside loam. Virginia tobacco became an immediate hit in London, despite the rantings of King James, who found smoking "loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain (and) dangerous to the lungs." Centuries ahead of his time medically, the king was unable to curb demand for the addictive weed, the profits from which made Rolfe, a widower, an attractive catch for Pocahontas. They were married in the spring of 1614, the first Anglo-America couple on record.

*Verbatim: Pocahontas had long believed Smith to be dead, though her father had his doubts. Still, Powhatan blessed her marriage to Rolfe. In keeping with his lifelong refusal to visit the tassantassas (trespassers), though, Powhatan did not attend his daughter's wedding. Instead, he sent two of her half-brothers and her uncle, Opechancanough, who represented her family and walked Pocahontas down the aisle, as her former husband, Kocoum, slipped quietly from the pages of history. (page 104).*

(more)

Q. What led to the formation of the first democratic body in the Western Hemisphere at Jamestown, just how democratic was it and what sort of legislation did the body take up?

A. With Jamestown still struggling 12 years after its founding, Virginia Company leaders decided to let the colonists themselves have a hand in running operations that, until then, were controlled in London, mostly by men who'd never seen the New World. Democracy wasn't exactly what the company had in mind: hands-on management is closer to the mark. But on July 30, 1619, two elected representatives from each of eleven James River settlements gathered as the burgesses with royal Gov. George Yeardley and his six-member state council at the rustic Anglican church at Jamestown. Two burgesses were promptly dismissed as their settlement claimed to be above the assembly's law. Only men could participate, and only those who owned land at that. However rough hewn, it was the first representative government in America and it took up matters both profound and mundane, prohibiting laziness, gambling and card-playing, while calling into question the authority of the king and Parliament to set policies for the colony.

*Verbatim: As the summer light faded and the enormity of the mission they'd undertaken set in, the weary assembly voted to suspend its proceedings until the next day. And so, twenty-seven in all, the pioneers of the rough-edged and almost accidental beginnings of democracy in America streamed out of the church and into the steamy darkness, piling into makeshift bunks in borrowed quarters scattered about the dusty town at the far edge of the known world, with little or no idea of the historic voyage they'd launched. (pages 114-115)*

Q. Where did the first Africans to arrive in English American come from, what did they find when they arrived and how is it the seeds of democracy and slavery were sown side by side along the banks of the James?

A. In the summer of 1619, a Dutch man-of-war and a British corsair attacked a Portuguese slave ship off the coast of Vera Cruz and stole an unknown number of Africans. They had been captured by African mercenaries from a village far inland along the great Kwanza River and wound up in the James River settlements just three weeks after the burgesses adjourned. Slavery was not practiced in Virginia at the time, though it was well established in other European colonies in the Caribbean and South America. Some of the Africans served as indentured servants and wound up eventually free. Over the coming decades, though, the elected burgesses drew sharp distinctions between the rights of white people and those of Africans and their descendants, leading to the eventual evolution of a full-blown slave society by the later part of the 17th Century.

*Verbatim: In the single month of August 1619, the seeds of democracy and slavery had been sown side by side along the banks of the James, the twisted paradox of American beginnings rooted in a contradiction that would confound and conflict the nation for centuries to come. Slavery was not to be some alien practice awkwardly grafted onto the trunk of American liberty. It was an integral and essential part of the nation's inception, without which the very means of American independence might never have been secured. Its origins passed with barely a historical whisper. (page 118)*

(more)

Q. When was the first colonial wife auction, why were the early shipments of women derided as the "fishing fleet" and who were these bold women who risked their lives crossing the Atlantic for a New World stake in Virginia?

A. In 1621, it dawned on the Virginia Company that without women to work the gardens, dress the game, make the clothes and bear new offspring, Jamestown would never establish itself as a place where proper Englishmen actually wanted to live. The problem: the company was broke. To raise money to send women to Jamestown, the company sold shares of stock. A handsome return was promised: settlers were charged between 120 and 150 pounds of tobacco for the privilege of taking a bride. Nearly a hundred women came to Virginia that year as part of what was derisively called the "fishing fleet," given each woman's supposed hope of landing a match.

*Verbatim: The youngest of the group, Jane Dyer, fifteen, tucked away a few personal treasures in a small wooden chest, along with the goods the company provided each prospective new bride: a new petticoat, lambskin gloves, two pairs each of stockings and shoes...With what heady mix of adventure, anticipation and dread they sailed that year, and with what heroics they summoned the courage of spirit to prevail, we can only guess today. Few kept diaries; many couldn't read or write. Whatever their expectations, the women found grave hardship in Virginia. Within two years, most were dead, taken by Indian attack or disease. (pages 122-123)*

# # #

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### A Conversation With Bob Deans

Q. Who is Bob Deans?

A. I grew up in Richmond, spent a lot of time wandering along the banks of the James River and its tributaries with my father and my friends, in pretty much every season of the year.

I've spent the past 27 years as a journalist, living in Charleston, Atlanta, New York, Tokyo and now Washington. I covered the White House for eight years and now I write about foreign affairs and national security policy for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the other Cox Newspapers.

I live in Bethesda with my wife and our three children and this is my first book.

Q. Why did you write a book about the James River?

A. I've always loved this river – that probably comes through in the book. I didn't realize, though, how much of who we are, as Americans, got its start there.

Jamestown - the first permanent English settlement in America. The first sustained clash between English and Native American people; the first democratic body in the Western Hemisphere; the first African slaves in English America - all of that happened here on the James River before the Pilgrims ever got to Plymouth.

The more I learned about this river and thought about it, I began to see the river as more than simply a stage for all this history but actually an extraordinary historical character in and of itself. So this book is a kind of biography of the river.

Q. The book doesn't begin with the Jamestown story. Why not?

A. Because there had been Native American people living along this river for many thousands of years. To begin the story with the arrival of the English would have given short shrift to the civilization that was here long before the English got here. I also felt it was important to lay the global groundwork for the English arrival, which is something I do in chapter three. So it isn't until chapter four that we really get the settlers into Jamestown.

(more)

Q. The book doesn't end with the Jamestown story either. Why not?

A. The story just wouldn't end there.

The James River was an essential incubator for the tobacco wealth that helped fund the American Revolution and for the political and ideological thought that lent voice to the cause.

The James River played a critical role in westward expansion. It sat on the razor's edge of the struggle between slave state and free. It was the strategic set piece of the Civil War, the object of four bloody years of fighting.

And on the day after the fall of Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, it was up the James River that Lincoln journeyed to visit the still-smoldering city in the final days of his life. This was, literally, the new birth of freedom that Lincoln called for at Gettysburg. That was the natural place to end the book.

Q. This is not a novel, obviously, but in some ways it reads like one.

A. That's because the characters are such astonishing personalities.

This is the river of Powhatan, the first great Indian chief to but heads against the English, his remarkable daughter, Pocahontas, as well as John Smith and John Rolfe.

It's the river of Jefferson - he grew up on this river. The man who would one day write the Declaration of Independence learned to read and write in a one-room schoolhouse overlooking the river just west of Richmond.

Patrick Henry knew this river well, gave his immortal "Liberty or Death" speech from a church along its banks.

Benedict Arnold staged raids along this river for the British during the Revolutionary War. Lafayette and Washington joined their troops along this river before trapping the British at Yorktown.

This was also where Gabriel Prosser organized a massive slave rebellion that was thwarted by a storm. He was hanged, along with two dozen of his compatriots in their own quest for liberty. Dred Scott came from a plantation not too far from the James.

And of course the pivotal campaign in the Civil War - pitting Davis and Lee against Lincoln and Grant - unfolded along the banks of the James.

These characters are larger than life and their voices do propel the narrative forward.

Q. Let's talk about a couple of these characters. Powhatan, what kind of a man?

A. Tough. Charismatic. Imposing. He could be terrifying. He held the power of life and death over the people - about 14,000 of them - who inhabited his chiefdom.

Powhatan, though, exercised power in what I think was a very sophisticated way. He consulted widely with shamans, priests and tribal chieftains. He paid a lot of attention to trade and seems to have been a very effective negotiator. He was able to balance the interests of more than two dozen separate tribes or clans, so he had formidable diplomatic skills.

And, when all else failed, he could be a fierce military adversary. People really didn't want to mess with him, and, in that way, he took care of his people.

He had his blind spots, to be sure. Overall, though, given what he was working with and what he was up against, Powhatan has to be judged a highly effective leader.

(more)

Q. Pocahontas.

A. An extraordinary woman whose life, while very short, was really a bridge that spanned two worlds - that of her people and of the English.

She was able to reach across the Atlantic - literally - at a time when most of the people she knew never ranged more than a hundred miles from the place of their birth.

John Smith called her the most remarkable woman in Virginia. By his account, she saved his life at least twice and kept Jamestown from collapsing.

John Rolfe fell in love with her, married her and took her to visit the Queen in London, where, tragically, she died at around the age of 21.

Q. What about Gabriel?

A. Gabriel was a slave who worked as a blacksmith on a tobacco plantation in Richmond at the turn of the Nineteenth Century. At the time, there were some six thousand people in Richmond, including at least three hundred free blacks.

They worked, often alongside slaves and Irish immigrants, building the James River Canal, the Virginia State Capitol, serving blue water ships that came into the port of Richmond. And so there was a kind of black middle class emerging in Richmond and Gabriel lived on the edge of that group.

He got caught stealing a pig, though, and, because he was a slave, he was strapped to a whipping post and given 39 lashes and he was branded on his thumb.

Enraged by this atrocity, Gabriel meticulously organized about five hundred people - from as far as a hundred miles away - to conduct a massive slave revolt. It was thwarted, he was caught, and hanged in downtown Richmond. He became a folk hero to black slaves and is still an important historical figure today.

Q. Is there a character you feel like you got to know for the first time while writing this book?

A. Richard Hakluyt. You've probably never heard of him - I certainly hadn't. He was enormously important.

Hakluyt was an Anglican Priest and learned geographer, an Oxford scholar who lectured on Aristotle and spoke at least seven languages. In 1584, he prepared a top secret national security brief for Queen Elizabeth that literally changed the world.

It was nothing less than a blueprint for British Empire, at a time when England was a second-rate power still struggling with the basics of nation-building.

In time, Hakluyt's vision led to the settlement of Jamestown, an adventure he remained very much a part of, as a shareholder in the Virginia Company of London.

Q. You mean Jamestown wasn't founded for religious freedom?

A. There was no religious freedom in Jamestown. Settlers attended the riverside Anglican church or they were first scolded, then whipped. Blasphemy was a hanging offense.

Jamestown was a corporation, owned by a joint stock company that expected fat dividend checks and a handsome return on its investment. It got neither.

(more)

Q. So investors lost money on Jamestown?

A. The Virginia Company was primarily interested in two things: gold and a shortcut to China. The Jamestown settlers risked their lives coming to Virginia believing they'd find both on the James River. Instead they found hardship, starvation, Indian fights and disease.

It was years before the colony could even sustain itself, much less make money, and that from an unexpected source: tobacco.

Q. If you could have lunch with any character in this book, who would it be?

A. Pocahontas.

Q. No, seriously.

A. Pocahontas was, by all accounts, captivating. She was also extraordinarily important. It's hard to imagine that Jamestown would have survived without her. Had it collapsed, we can only guess how history might have been different.

Q. Do you think if she had lived, she might have helped to prevent the conflict between English settlers and native people?

A. A fascinating thought.

A lot of very smart people disagree with this, but I think the answer is yes. I don't really think the conflict was necessary.

The English had many things the Indians valued: copper, for one. The ability to make glass. Iron implements like axe heads, picks and hoes. The use of water power and millstones to grind grain.

These were enormously valuable things to have in the early 17th Century, and there are a number of instances in which the Indians were perfectly willing to exchange food - their chief currency - for these kinds of things. So there clearly was a basis for negotiation and accommodation.

That could have led, I believe, to understandings about the use of land, the river and other essentials through which both sides might have coexisted in peace.

The fact that they reached exactly those kinds of understandings for extended periods of time - years in some cases - would seem to bear that out.

Q. What would it have taken for that to have worked?

A. The settlers would have to have invested the time to learn more about the native people, their customs, their interests, their priorities, their needs. The settlers would have to have recognized the extent to which they were trespassers on land other people had lived on for thousands of years. They would have had to respect all of that and take steps to mitigate the impact their settlements had on the native people.

Some tried. George Thorpe, a former member of the British Parliament, was charged with building a college for the native Virginians. It was a big investment. He had a hundred men working for him to build the school when he was attacked by Indians and chopped into pieces.

Ultimately, neither side had the cultural knowledge, the political dexterity or the diplomatic skills to pull it together. That was unfortunate, and it offers, I think, an important lesson to this country in our dealings with other nations around the world.

(more)

Q. What was the hardest part of this book to write?

A. Probably the chapter on Native American life along the James. The Indians left behind no written language, no black and white records we can consult. I didn't feel like they should be penalized for that so I tried as hard as I could to tell their story using what I had.

Most of what we know about them comes from three sources: archaeology, an imperfect science at best; the impressions of the English, which reflect cultural bias and are factually suspect; and the parallels we can draw between the Virginia Indians and similar groups - the Algonquin, in particular - about which more is known.

I relied on all of those sources, then spent time with modern-day native Americans, at various places along the river, to try to put their voices on the landscape, which was very important to me and I think comes across as something very powerful in the book.

Q. You're not a historian.

A. No, and some may find fault with that.

I'm a journalist. I've spent a quarter of a century writing for newspapers. I've covered school board hearings, murder trials, legislative battles, tax and budget policy, kings and prime ministers, presidents and war.

The challenge I faced in writing this book was much like the work of writing news stories each day. In both, you have to hold your prejudices and preconceptions in check while you pursue the record in search of facts, winnow out truth from myth, find the most authoritative voices you can to help illuminate the subject then report what you learn as faithfully as you can.

Maybe neither of us wants to admit it, but historians and journalists share a good bit in common. I've always respected the work of great historians, but perhaps never quite as much as I do now. It's hard work trying to get history right.

Q. Do you think the years you spent covering Bill Clinton and George Bush helped you in writing this book?

A. Covering the White House has taught me a lot about how people exercise power, how they confront the limits of power and how even the Oval Office can be shaped as much by personalities as by policies.

I recognize a lot of the people in this book. They have strengths and weaknesses, just like Bush and Clinton do. They have moments of lucid clarity compromised by bad judgment and miscues. They have good intentions undermined by poor timing, incompetent subordinates, clumsy political partners or just plain bad luck.

It's frustrating at a distance; it can be heartbreaking up close.

Q. Who do you think would like to read this book?

A. Anyone who is interested in our history, certainly. But I really wrote this for people who wouldn't ordinarily pick up a history book. People who might like to understand more about who we are as a country and where we came from. Especially now, as we're poised to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of Jamestown, where the first permanent English settlement in America was founded in May of 1607.

(more)

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Q. How do you think Americans should celebrate this anniversary?

A. It's important to remember that not everyone regards this as a celebration.

Native Americans certainly don't: to them it marks the beginning of a tragic period in which they were run off of native lands, slaughtered, cheated, exposed to decimating disease, essentially attacked, subjugated and all but destroyed on land they had lived on for thousands of years.

African-Americans can't help but look at Jamestown and think of it as the place where slavery in this country began, this country's shameful contribution to the greatest forced migration of people in history.

Even for Europeans, Jamestown was a place of violence, struggle, torment and death. It was no cartoon wonderland. A lot of truly horrific things happened there.

What we can, and I think should, do, though, is to commemorate what happened here because, after all, this is the birthplace of our country.

If we can use this as a moment to reflect on who we are and how we got here, to honor the contributions of all our people - not just the same old familiar few - then I think we can use the power of history to pull people together, rather than to tear us apart. That may be the best birthday present the country could give itself.

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