

WHY IS AMERICA CALLED "AMERICA"

Why did European geographers give the name America to the lands that Columbus discovered? Why did they not name them instead after Columbus?

The reason is that to the end of his life Columbus believed that his discoveries were part of Asia. The man who did the most to correct this mistaken idea was Amerigo Vespucci. Vespucci was an Italian sailor from the city of Florence. During the late 1490s he wrote some letters in which he described two voyages of exploration that he had made along the coasts of South America. He was sure, he wrote, that these coasts were part of a new continent.

Some years later Vespucci's letters were read by a German scholar who was revising an old geography of the world. The letters convinced the scholar that Vespucci was correct, and that the lands beyond the Atlantic were a new continent. To honor Vespucci the scholar named them America, using the feminine form of Vespucci's first name as the other continents had female names.