

Top 10 (part 2) of Iconic Figures Italian-Americans [B2]

Chiudiamo la nostra lista degli italo-americani più influenti della storia recente con cinque personaggi che hanno avuto successo in campi diversi come la scienza, gli affari, la politica o il crimine...



Apart from gastronomy and the entertainment business, many other aspects of American life have been profoundly influenced by Italian-Americans. This is true of the business world, sports and science. Sports greats include Joe DiMaggio in baseball, Rocky Marciano in boxing, Dan Marino in American football and Mario Andretti in motor racing. And there are three Nobel Prize-winning Italian-American scientists: physicist Enrico Fermi, astrophysicist Riccardo Giacconi, and virologist Renato Dulbecco.

LAW AND ORDER

With Italian immigration, however, came the most famous criminal organisation in the world: the Mafia. Newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s were full of shocking stories featuring gangsters such as Lucky Luciano, Johnny Torrio and Al Capone. Of course, there have also been many more

Italian-Americans who have dedicated their lives to improving US law and order. While his reputation has suffered since then, as New York City [mayor](#) in 2001, Rudy Giuliani gained [praise](#) for his immediate response to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Time magazine named him Person of the Year and in 2002 he received an honorary [knighthood](#) from Queen Elizabeth II.

GOVERNMENT

Since the 1950s, Italian-Americans have been heavily involved in US politics at local, state and national levels. By the early 21st century, thirty-one men and women of Italian descent were sitting in the US [House](#) and Senate, and two [justices](#), Antonin Scalia and Samuel Alito, were [appointed](#) to the Supreme Court. Here are just a few of the most remarkable, if sometimes controversial, Italian-Americans who made an impact in these fields: **6. Joe DiMaggio (1914-1999)** Joe DiMaggio was born to poor Sicilian immigrants in California. His father, a fisherman, wanted Joe to follow him into the [trade](#), but his son had other ideas. Joe would grow up to become one of the greatest baseball players in history. Between 1936 and 1951, he helped the New York Yankees win nine World Series Championships. DiMaggio [holds](#) one of the most extraordinary records in American sporting history by recording [hits](#) in fifty-six consecutive games. Admired for his grace, dignity, integrity and athleticism, DiMaggio transcended the baseball field and came to [embody](#) the American hero. When he married Marilyn Monroe in 1954, the wedding ceremony united the country's most potent male and female icons of the 1950s, but the marriage [lasted](#) less than a year. After Monroe died in 1962, DiMaggio sent six red roses to her grave three times a week until his death in 1999. His inspirational qualities were immortalised in lines in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Simon & Garfunkel's *Mrs. Robinson*. Other Italian-American sporting heroes who inspired the public include the boxer Rocky Marciano and football player Joe Montana. **7. Al Capone (1899-1947)** The most famous gangster of all time, Alphonse Gabriel Capone, [nicknamed Scarface](#), dominated organised crime in Chicago from 1925 to 1931. During the Prohibition years, he made hundreds of millions of dollars from selling illegal liquor. A national celebrity, [cheered](#)

by the public at baseball games, he famously said: “I am just a businessman, giving the people what they want.” He never had a bank account in his life. Shockingly violent, he was responsible for the infamous Saint Valentine’s Day massacre of rival gangsters, and regularly [beat](#) people with a baseball bat. In 1931, Capone was finally [charged](#) and found guilty ... of tax evasion! He spent eight years in Alcatraz prison, where he was treated for syphilis and gonorrhea. In 1946, doctors said he had the mentality of a twelve-year-old — a murderous twelve-year-old! He died of cardiac arrest — only his second ‘arrest’ — on January 25, 1947.

8. Enrico Fermi (1901-1954) Enrico Fermi played a vital role in US history. Often called “the father of the nuclear age”, or “the architect of the atomic bomb”, Fermi left Italy for the US in 1938 to escape new racial laws introduced by Mussolini that affected his Jewish wife. On his way to the States, he visited Stockholm to collect the Nobel Prize in Physics for his work on the artificial radioactivity produced by neutrons. In 1939, he joined the Manhattan Project, an [undertaking](#) that would eventually produce the world’s first nuclear bomb. He led a team which would create the world’s first nuclear reactor, the Chicago Pile-1. His friends called him [The Pope](#) because of his leadership qualities and [self-assurance](#). Fermi died at just fifty-three, and to this day is considered Italy’s greatest physicist since Galileo Galilei.

9. Lee Iacocca (1924-2019) Lee Iacocca was traumatised by the effects of the Depression on his Italian immigrant parents, as they struggled to survive in their hot-dog restaurant. He was [terminated](#) to be a millionaire. He started in Ford as an engineer in 1946. Famously [mean](#) in his early career, he would take [lightbulbs](#) from his office to use at home. Rising rapidly up the company’s career structure, he was president of Ford by 1970. Along the way, in a [lightbulb moment](#), he created the incredibly successful 1964 Ford Mustang. Buyers [besieged](#) Ford [dealerships](#) in scenes similar to Beatlemania. Time and Newsweek put him on their [front covers](#). In the 1980s he changed companies and rescued the Chrysler Corporation, which was in serious trouble, on a salary of just one dollar a year. He appeared in [ads](#) for Chrysler’s K-Car, showing his [no-nonsense](#) style: “If you can find a better car, buy it!” Now a celebrity, America’s most famous [CEO](#) and car salesman, he appeared in Miami Vice. People magazine called him “the new Italian [Stallion](#) – a sex symbol for the Corporate Age”. When he retired in 1992, the embodiment of the American

Dream, he celebrated with parties all over the world. **10. Nancy Pelosi (1940)**
Nancy Pelosi is the first woman and the first Italian-American to be Speaker of the House of Representatives. She is now in her 18th term representing California and has led the House Democrats since 2003. She was decisively important in the passing of many of Obama's landmark bills, including the Affordable Care Act. She is considered one of the most powerful speakers in history, an "iron fist in a Gucci glove". She has no false modesty: "I'm a master legislator. I am a strategic, politically astute leader." At the end of Trump's State of the Union address in February 2020, she tore up her own copy: "It was such a dirty speech!" She later called Trump a "psychopathic nut". She tried to impeach him twice.

Glossary

- **mayor** = sindaco
- **hits** = successi
- **landmark** = pietra miliare
- **an “iron fist in a Gucci glove”** = pugno di ferro in un guanto di Gucci
- **nicknamed** = dare un nomignolo
- **cheered** = fare il tifo
- **mean** = meschino
- **lightbulbs** = lampadine
- **dealerships** = concessionari
- **Speaker** = Speaker della Camera dei rappresentanti
- **trade** = professione
- **holds** = avere, abbracciare
- **beat** = battere
- **self-assurance** = sicurezza di se stesso
- **ads** = anuncios
- **lasted** = durare
- **charged** = accusare
- **undertaking** = progetto
- **The Pope** = Il Papa
- **CEO** = direttore esecutivo
- **praise** = elogio
- **justices** = giudici
- **lightbulb moment** = momento d'ispirazione
- **besieged** = assediare
- **passing** = approvazione
- **knighthood** = cavalierato
- **Scarface** = sfregiato
- **front covers** = copertine
- **Stallion** = stallone
- **nut** = pazzo
- **embody** = incarnare
- **term** = termine
- **bills** = leggi

- **tore up** = spezzare
- **House** = Camera dei rappresentanti degli Stati Uniti
- **appointed** = nominare
- **no-nonsense** = al sodo
- **Affordable Care Act** = Legge sulla Assistenza Sostenibile
- **State of the Union address** = discorso sullo stato dell'Unione