

Top 5 Italian-Americans Iconic Figures [B2]

Since the end of the 19th century, Italian immigrants have done their best to live the American Dream. Here is a shortlist of some of the most successful in the arts, gastronomy and show business.



The real name of Hollywood's most famous male sex symbol was Rodolfo Alfonso Raffaello Pierre Filiberto Guglielmi di Valentina d'Antonguolla. Luckily for history, his fans, and the actor's autograph-[signing duties](#), he was better known as Rudolph Valentino or just Valentino. Born in Italy in 1895, he emigrated to the US in 1913, quickly [heading](#) to Hollywood. Twenty-three films later, in 1921, he finally [struck gold](#) and became a star with films like *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and *The Sheik*. The Hollywood [moguls](#) called him The Great Lover or The Latin Lover. Women loved his dark good looks and tremendous charisma, [whereas](#) men were disgusted and walked out of the cinema. Many newspapers called him "effeminate" and even "a [threat](#) to the "All American man". Valentino's reign as Hollywood [heartthrob](#) was sadly very brief. On August 23, 1926, he died of complications after an operation for appendicitis. At his funeral in Manhattan, around one hundred thousand people [lined](#) the streets to pay their respects. There were [reports](#) of suicides, and a [riot](#) took place outside

the [funeral home](#). For many years, a woman dressed in black visited his crypt to leave a red rose in his memory. Considered by many to be the greatest American singer of 20th-century popular music, Frank Sinatra was the only child of Italian immigrants. The singer's [rise to fame](#) in the 1940s was accompanied by fan hysteria not seen since the days of Rudolph Valentino. He was quickly [nicknamed](#) The Voice, to be followed in later years by Ol' Blue Eyes. The same decade saw the beginnings of Sinatra's [lifelong](#) association with the Mafia, part of the singer's very public personal life. His many [hits](#) include My Way, Strangers in the Night and New York, New York. He was also a Hollywood superstar in the 1950s and 1960s with films such as From Here to Eternity and High Society. With Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr., he formed a group of friends called The [Rat Pack](#), appearing on [stage](#) and TV to great success. To mark his death on May 14, 1998, the Empire State Building turned a symbolic 'Sinatra blue'. Robert De Niro is the epitome of the Italian-American [tough-guy](#). The winner of two Oscars, his filmography includes such classics as Taxi Driver and [Raging](#) Bull, but he is best-known for his roles in Mafia movies, including The Godfather Part II and The Untouchables. The Order of the Sons of Italy in America, an influential Italian-American organisation, has criticised De Niro for making "a career of playing gangsters of Italian [descent](#)", and even tried to [prevent](#) him from receiving Italian citizenship in 2006. His improvised [line](#) in Taxi Driver — "You talkin' to me?" — is one of the best-known, most copied [lines](#) in film history. The actor has made hundreds of millions of dollars from his Nobu hotel and restaurant empire. Madonna is the most successful female recording artist of all time. Madonna has sold over three hundred million records and taken \1.5 [billion](## "miliardo") from her concerts, a record for a solo artist. A pioneer of dance-pop, her controversial songs, such as Like a Virgin and Papa Don't [Preach](## "fare la predica"), covered social, sexual, political and religious themes at a time when that was rare. Her look, performances and MTV videos influenced millions in the 1980s. She is famous for [pushing the boundaries](## "superare i limiti") of artistic expression in her songs and art. Her [coffee-table book](## "libro di lusso"), Sex, is full of provocative and explicit images ... of herself. On one tour she dressed as a [whip-cracking](## "schiocca la frusta") dominatrix. A strong feminist, she has always been in total control of her career, which has also included roles in films such as

Desperately Seeking Susan and Evita. With a fortune estimated at \)800 million, she is a generous donor to [charities](#). Joe Bastianich is one of America's most successful [restaurateurs](#). He is also a winemaker, [vineyard owner](#), author, showman, TV personality and professional musician. Bastianich [learnt the cooking ropes](#) in his immigrant Italian parents' restaurant, Felidia. After spending a year as a [bond trader](#) on Wall Street, he moved to cooking, opening his first restaurant, Becco, in 1993. He later [set up](#) the very successful Batali & Bastianich Restaurant Group with his mother, Lidia, and [fellow](#) Italian-American chef Mario Batali. Lidia writes bestselling cookbooks and is an Emmy Award winner for her TV series Lidia's Kitchen. The restaurant group now owns thirty restaurants in four countries. [In his thirties](#), he was diagnosed with sleep apnea, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. He completely changed his lifestyle, participating regularly in the New York Marathon, and [lost](#) twenty-three kilos. In 2010, he began his career in television, appearing on MasterChef, then MasterChef Italia, then MasterChef Junior. He was well-known for his [blunt](#) culinary verdicts. He then appeared on Italian TV shows. Since 2019, when he [released](#) his first solo album, AKA Joe, he has concentrated on his passion for music.

Glossary

- **nicknamed** = soprannominare
- **bond trader** = agente di borsa
- **whereas** = mentre
- **threat** = minaccia
- **riot** = sommossa
- **hits** = successi
- **restaurateurs** = ristoratori
- **vineyard owner** = proprietario di vigneti
- **In his thirties** = sulla trentina
- **moguls** = magnati
- **coffee-table book** = libro di lusso
- **released** = pubblicare, lanciare
- **heading** = dirigersi
- **rise to fame** = ascesa alla fama
- **lifelong** = di tutta una vita
- **tough-guy** = tipo duro
- **learnt the cooking ropes** = imparare i fondamentali
- **set up** = fondare
- **reports** = racconti
- **descent** = discendenza
- **line** = battuta
- **billion** = miliardo
- **signing** = firmare
- **Rat Pack** = branco di ratti
- **Preach** = fare la predica
- **pushing the boundaries** = superare i limiti
- **whip-cracking** = schiocca la frusta
- **duties** = doveri
- **heartthrob** = rubacuori
- **stage** = palcoscenico
- **blunt** = secchi, bruschi
- **struck gold** = avere successo
- **funeral home** = pompe funebri

- **Raging** = scatenato
- **prevent** = impedire
- **charities** = associazioni di beneficenza
- **fellow** = collega
- **lost** = perdere