



National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame

Italian American, Little Italy, Chicago

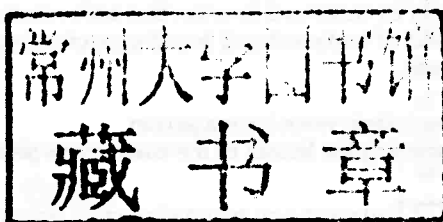
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Published in 2011

Printed in: U.S.A., U.K., Germany. This book was not produced in Mauritius.

ISBN: 978-613-6-16867-8

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National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame

The **National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame** is a nonprofit institution honoring exceptional U.S. athletes of Italian descent. Since its founding in 1977, more than two hundred Italian Americans have been inducted into this hall of fame.

A 44,000-square-foot (4,000 m²) building for the Hall of Fame and museum is on Taylor Street in the heart of Chicago's "Little Italy".

External links

- National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame ^[1] website

References

- [1] <http://www.niashf.org/>

Italian American

Italian American



Notable Italian Americans:

Madonna · Fiorello La Guardia · Robert De Niro
Francis Ford Coppola · Nancy Pelosi · Frank Sinatra
Joe DiMaggio · Samuel Alito · Rudy Giuliani
Martin Scorsese · Enrico Fermi · Sylvester Stallone

Total population

17,815,289
6.0% of the US population (2008)^[1]

Languages

American English · Italian · Sicilian · Neapolitan, other Italian dialects and languages of Italian historical minorities

Religion

predominantly Roman Catholic, with Protestant and Jewish minorities.

Related ethnic groups

Italian people, Italian Canadian, Italian Argentine, Italian Brazilian, Italian Mexican, Italian Australian, Italian Briton

An **Italian American** (Italian: *italoamericano* singular, Italian: *italoamericani* plural) is an American of Italian ancestry. The designation may also refer to someone possessing Italian and American dual citizenship. Italian Americans are the fourth largest European ethnic group in the United States (not including "American" ethnicity, an ethnonym used by many whites and non-whites in the United States; Overall, Italian Americans rank seventh, behind German, Irish, African American, English, "American" and Mexican).

About 5 million Italians immigrated to the U.S. The greatest surge of immigration, 1880–1914, brought 4 million Italians to America. About eighty percent of these were from the Mezzogiorno, or southern Italy, including Sicily, almost all of the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. This region was mainly agricultural and economically underdeveloped and, after Italian unification, benefited little from the economy of the industrialized North. The Italian government encouraged emigration of landless peasants to relieve economic pressures in the South. In America, most began as unskilled laborers.^[2] Italian Americans have moved from the lower rungs of the economic scale (in 1910) to a level comparable to the national average by 1970. They have tended



Mulberry Street, along which New York City's Little Italy is centered. Lower East Side, circa 1900.

strongly to emphasize the family, the Church, fraternal societies, and politics.^[3]

The experiences of Italians and their descendants in America have been extremely varied, depending upon the region to which they immigrated, and the era in which they immigrated. They helped shape America and were, in turn, shaped by it. No common identity is shared by all Italian Americans; rather, they are as diverse as the American population itself. They have excelled in all fields of endeavor, and have gained prominence in politics, business, law, medicine, television, literature, education, the fine arts, the culinary arts, science, the military, engineering, sports, music, and entertainment.

History

Early arrivals

The Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano was the first European to enter New York Bay. The first Italian to reside in America was Pietro Alberti, a Venetian seaman who, in 1635, settled in what would eventually become New York City. A group of 300 Waldensians arrived from Italy in 1640 in search of a more hospitable place to practice their religion. The Tagliaferro family, originally from Venice, was one of the first families to settle in Virginia.

These were joined by a relative small but steady stream of new arrivals, some of whom had been invited to come to America because they possessed much needed skills in agriculture and the making of glass, silk and wine. Others came because of their musical abilities as teachers and performers, such as the group of Italian musicians Thomas Jefferson had invited to come to form a military band, which later became the nucleus of the U.S. Marine Band. Still others came as adventurers, explorers, missionaries and political refugees.

These early arrivals settled in many different areas, but constituted a relatively small part of the American population as a whole. However, their contributions were very significant in the founding and settling of the country. Filippo Mazzei, a physician and promoter of liberty, was a close friend and confidant of Jefferson. He published a pamphlet containing the phrase: "All men are by nature equally free and independent", which Jefferson incorporated essentially intact into the Declaration of Independence. Italian artists and sculptors were brought to Washington to work on the new Capital building and to create some of its major monuments. Constantino Brumidi created the frescoed interior of the Capital dome, and spent the rest of his life executing still other artworks to beautify the Capital. Later, the six Piccirilli brothers sculpted the Lincoln Memorial.

Because the territorial claims of the British, French and Spanish were all based on the explorations of Italian navigators, Italians were also involved in exploring and mapping these territories, and in establishing settlements. The southwest and California were explored and mapped by Eusebio Chino, an Italian priest. Henry Di Tonti, together with the French explorer LaSalle, explored the Great Lakes region. Later Di Tonti founded the first European settlement in Illinois in 1679, and the first French settlement in Arkansas in 1683. His brother Alphonse was the co-founder of Detroit, and its colonial governor for 12 years.

Since France and Spain were Catholic countries, many missionaries were sent by the Catholic Church to convert the native population to Christianity and to provide for the spiritual needs of the settlers. Among these were Italian missionaries of the Jesuit and Franciscan orders, who were active in many parts of America, and especially in the west. Italian Jesuits founded numerous missions, schools and five colleges in the west, later to become Jesuit universities (San Francisco, Seattle, Gonzaga, Santa Clara and Regis). In the east, the Italian Franciscans founded hospitals, orphanages, schools, and a college - later to become St. Bonaventure University.

The early arrivals were scattered throughout the country, with the largest concentration being in the northeast. It was there that recognition of their common Italian roots and culture was the greatest. The first opera house in the country opened in 1833 in New York through the efforts of Lorenzo Da Ponte, Mozart's former librettist, who had immigrated to America. The first Italian American newspaper, "L'Eco d'Italia" was published in New York in 1849 by Francesco de Casale. The first Columbus Day celebration was organized by Italian Americans in San Francisco in

1869.

Italians served in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, both as soldiers and officers. Six Italian Americans received the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Civil War, the first of which was Colonel Luigi di Cesnola, who later became the first director of the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York. Italian American involvement in politics had already begun. In 1837 John Phinizy (Finizzi) became the mayor of Augusta Georgia. In 1880 Anthony Ghio became the mayor of Texarkana Texas. Francis Spinola, the first Italian American to serve in Congress, was elected in 1887 from New York.

The main period of immigration

After Italian unification, in 1861, economic conditions worsened considerably for many in southern Italy and Sicily. Heavy tax burdens and other repressive measures imposed on the South made an already difficult situation virtually impossible for many tenant farmers, and small business and land owners. Multitudes chose to emigrate rather than try to eke out a meager living.

From 1880 to 1924 an estimated 5 million Italian immigrants arrived in the United States, the majority between 1890 and 1915. Once in America, the immigrants faced great difficulties. Usually with no knowledge of the English language, often illiterate, and with little money many of the immigrants were compelled to accept the poorest paying and most undesirable jobs, and were frequently exploited by the middlemen who acted as intermediaries between them and the prospective employers.^[4] Many sought housing in the older sections of the large northeastern cities in which they settled, which became known as "Little Italies". They often lived in overcrowded tenements, where tuberculosis and other communicable diseases were a major health issue. About a third of the immigrants, so called "birds of passage", intended to stay in the United States for only a limited time, followed by a return to Italy with enough in savings to re-establish themselves there.^[5] While many did return to Italy, others chose to stay, or were prevented from returning by the outbreak of World War I.

The Italian male immigrants in the Little Italies were most often employed in manual labor, heavily involved in public works, such as the construction of roads, sewers, subways and bridges being carried out at the time in the northeastern cities. The woman most frequently worked as seemstresses in the garment industry or in their homes. Many established small businesses in the Little Italies to satisfy the day-to-day needs of their fellow immigrants.

In spite of the economic hardship of the immigrants, civil and social life flourished in the Italian American neighborhoods of the large northeastern cities. Italian theater, band concerts, choral recitals, puppet shows, mutual-aid societies, and social clubs were available to the immigrants.^[6] An important event, the "festa", became for many an important connection to the traditions of their ancestral villages in Italy and Sicily. The festa involved an elaborate procession through the streets in honor of a patron saint or the Madonna in which a large statue was carried by a team of men, with musicians marching behind. Followed by food, fireworks and general merriment, the festa became an important occasion that helped give the immigrants a sense of unity and common identity.

To assist the immigrants in the Little Italies, who were overwhelmingly Catholic, Pope Leo XIII dispatched a sizeable contingent of priests, nuns and brothers of the Italian Scalabrini Order. Among these was Sister Frances Cabrini, who founded schools, hospitals and orphanages and who, after her death, was declared the first American saint. Hundreds of parishes were founded by the Scalabrini priests to serve the needs of the Italian communities.

The destinations of many of the Italian immigrants were not the large cities of the northeast, but more remote regions of the country. They were drawn there by opportunities in agriculture, mining, railroad construction, lumbering and other activities underway at the time. Many of the immigrants had contracted to work in these areas of the country as a condition for payment of their passage. In many cases, especially in the south, the immigrants were subject to economic exploitation, hostility and sometimes even violence.^[7] Many of the Italian laborers who went to these areas were later joined by wives and children, which resulted in the establishment of permanent Italian American settlements in diverse parts of the country.

In time, the Italian immigrants and their children began adjusting to life in their adopted country, and making contributions to mainstream American life and culture. Many of the immigrants had brought with them specialized skills and knowledge, and an entrepreneurial spirit. A significant number of business innovations were brought about by the Italian immigrants. Amadeo Giannini originated the concept of branch banking to serve the Italian American community in San Francisco. He founded the Bank of Italy, which later became the Bank of America. His bank was also instrumental in providing financing to the film industry developing on the west coast at that time. Other companies founded by Italian Americans - such as Ghiardelli Chocolates, Progresso, Planters Peanuts, Del Monte Foods, Contadina, Chef Boyardee, Italian Swiss Colony Wines and Jacuzzi - became nationally known brand names in time. An Italian immigrant, Italo Marcioni, is credited with inventing the ice cream cone in 1898. Another Italian immigrant, Giuseppe Bellanca, brought with him in 1912 an advanced aircraft design, which he began producing. One of his planes, piloted by Cesare Sabelli, made one of the first trans-Atlantic flights in 1934.

Italian Americans became involved in entertainment and sports. Rudolph Valentino became one of the first great film icons. Dixieland jazz music had a number of important Italian American innovators, the most famous being Domenic LaRocca of New Orleans, whose quintet made the first jazz recording in 1917. The first Italian American professional baseball player, Ping Bodie (Giuseppe Pezzole), began playing for the Chicago White Sox in 1912. Ralph DePalma won the Indianapolis 500 in 1915.

Italian Americans became increasingly involved in politics, government and the labor movement. Andrew Longino was elected Governor of Mississippi in 1900. Fiorello LaGuardia was elected from New York in 1916 to serve in the Congress. Charles Bonaparte was Secretary of the Navy and later Attorney General in the Theodore Roosevelt administration, and founded the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Italian Americans were leading activists in unionizing workers in industries where they constituted a sizeable part of the work force, such as the mining, textiles and garment industries.

World War I and after

World War I, together with restrictive immigration laws passed in 1917 and 1924, effectively put an end to the large flow of Italian immigrants into the country. By 1920, the Little Italies had stabilized and grown considerably more prosperous as workers were able to obtain higher-paying jobs, often as skilled workers. English was now the language most commonly heard on the streets of the Little Italies.^[8] The passage of child labor laws resulted in Italian American children staying in school at least through the eighth grade, which assured a better future for them as they entered adulthood.

The Italian American community wholeheartedly supported the war effort, and its young men enlisted in large numbers.^[9] It was estimated that Italian American soldiers made up more than 10% of the total American forces in World War I, a disproportionately high percentage of the total. Two Italian Americans were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for their service.

Many of the returning soldiers brought with them a new perspective and confidence, which led them to seek better employment opportunities. Jobs as policemen, firemen and civil servants became available to Italian Americans; while others found employment as plumbers, electricians, mechanics and carpenters. Women found jobs as civil servants, secretaries, dressmakers, and clerks. The changing employment prospective occasioned large numbers to move to neighborhoods outside of the Italian enclaves. The Depression (1929-39) had a major impact on the Italian American community, and temporarily reversed some of the earlier gains that had been made. Large numbers benefitted from New Deal work programs, such as the Works Progress Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corp.

Italian Americans made great upward strides in the post-war years, and contributed significantly to American life and culture:

In politics, Alf Smith (Ferrara) was the first Italian American governor of New York, and a candidate for president in 1928. Fiorello LaGuardia became mayor of New York City in 1931. Vito Marcantonio was

elected in 1934 to Congress from New York. Italian Americans continued their significant involvement in the labor movement. James Petrillo became president of the American Federation of Musicians.

There were numerous Italian Americans involved in music, both classical and popular. Under the outstanding leadership of Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the Metropolitan Opera became a world-class musical organization. Many Italian operatic singers and conductors were invited to perform for American audiences, including the great tenor Enrico Caruso. The legendary conductor Arturo Toscanini introduced many Americans to classical music through his popular NBC Symphony Orchestra radio broadcasts. Rosa Ponselle, the daughter of Italian immigrants, made her debut at the Metropolitan Opera in 1918, and subsequently became a world famous performer. Zino Francescatti, the son of Italian immigrants, was a musical prodigy who made his public debut at age 8 in 1920, and subsequently became a world renowned violin soloist. Popular singers included Russ Columbo, who established a new singing style that greatly influenced Frank Sinatra and other singers that followed. On Broadway, Harry Warren (Salvatore Guaragna) wrote the music for 42nd Street, and won three Academy Awards for his compositions. Guy Lombardo formed a popular dance band, which became an institution on New Year's Eve in Times Square.

The film industry of this era included a number of Italian Americans who became well known. Frank Capra won three Academy Awards for directing. Italian American cartoonists were responsible for some of the most popular animated characters. Donald Duck was created by Alfred Tagliaferro, Woody Woodpecker was a creation of Walter Lantz (Lanza), with Casper the Friendly Ghost being the creation of Joseph Oriolo.

Involvement in sports accelerated, and brought many Italian Americans national recognition. Golfer Gene Sarazen won both the Professional Golf Association and U.S. Open Tournaments in 1922. Peter DePaola won the Indianapolis 500 in 1925. Tony Lazzeri and Frank Crosetti started playing for the New York Yankees in 1926. Tony Canzoneri won the lightweight boxing championship in 1930. Lou Little (Luigi Piccolo) began coaching the Columbia University football team in 1930. The legendary Joe DiMaggio began playing for the New York Yankees in 1936. Hank Luisetti was a three time All American basketball player at Stanford University from 1936 to 1940.

In business, Italian Americans had become leading producers of fresh fruits and vegetables by recognizing the untapped potential of the large tracts of land surrounding many of the major cities. They cultivated the land and raised produce, which was trucked into the nearby cities and often sold directly to the consumer through farmer markets. In California, Italian Americans had become the leading growers of grapes, and producers of wine. Many well known wine brands, such as Mondavi, Carlo Rossi, Petri, Sebastiani, and Gallo emerged from these early enterprises. Italian American companies were the leading importers of Italian wines, processed foods, textiles, marble and manufactured goods.

World War II and after

As a member of the Axis powers, Italy declared war on the United States in 1941. Any concerns about the loyalty of Italian Americans were quickly dispelled. More than a half a million Italian Americans joined the various branches of the military. In spite of this display of loyalty, hundreds of Italians viewed as a potential threat to the country were interned in detention camps, some for up to 2 years. As many as 600,000 others, who had not become citizens, were required to carry identity cards identifying them as "resident alien". Thousands more on the West Coast were required to move inland, often losing their homes and businesses in the process. A number of Italian-language newspapers were forced to close because of their past support of Mussolini. Two books, "Una Storia Segreta" by Lawrence DiStasi and "Uncivil Liberties" by Stephen Fox; and a movie, "Prisoners Among Us", document these World War II developments.

Italian Americans served with distinction during the war, and 14 were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Among these was Sgt. John Basilone, who became the second most decorated serviceman in World War II. In the air, Capt. Don Gentile became one of the war's leading aces, with 30 German planes downed. At home, the work of

Enrico Fermi was instrumental in shortening the war. Fermi, a Nobel Prize winning nuclear physicist, came to the United States from Italy in 1938. He directed a team at the University of Chicago that created the world's first sustained nuclear chain reaction, which clearly demonstrated the feasibility of an atom bomb. Fermi later became a key member of the team at Los Alamos that developed the first atom bomb. His work on the nuclear chain reaction laid the foundation for the nuclear power industry which began developing after the war.

The post-war period was a time of great social change for Italian Americans. Many aspired to a college education, which became possible for returning veterans through the GI Bill. Better educated, Italian Americans entered mainstream American life in great numbers. The Little Italies were largely abandoned by the younger generation, who more often chose to live in other urban areas and in the suburbs. Many married outside of their ethnic group, most frequently with other ethnic Catholics, but increasingly also with those of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds.^{[10] [11]}

Italian Americans took advantage of the new opportunities that became generally available to all after World War II. They made enormous strides in virtually all fields of endeavor:

Italian Americans entered politics at the local, state and national levels in large numbers. In 1950, John Pastore of Rhode Island became the first Italian American to be elected to the Senate. In the same year, Vincent Impellitteri became mayor of New York City. Anthony Celebrezze, an immigrant, became mayor of Cleveland in 1953, and was later appointed Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in the Kennedy administration. Peter Rodino chaired the House Judiciary Committee, and lead the impeachment hearings of Richard Nixon. John Sirica presided over the Watergate hearings that ultimately lead to Nixon's resignation. Ella Grasso was the first woman elected Governor of Connecticut in 1980. Mario Cuomo was elected Governor of New York in 1982. Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman vice presidential candidate in U.S. history.

Scores of Italian Americans became popular singers in the post-war years. Frank Sinatra continued his legendary career, and was joined by Mario Lanza, Perry Como, Dean Martin, Frankie Laine, Vic Damone, Don Cornell, Bobby Darin, Johnny Desmond, Bobby Rydell, Julius La Rosa, Connie Francis, Joanie James and a host of others. Composers Henry Mancini and Bill Conti won numerous Academy Awards for their songs and film scores. Classical and operatic composers John Corregiani, Norman Dello Joio, Domenic Argento, and Gian Carlo Menotti were honored with Pulitzer Prizes and Grammy Awards.

In professional baseball Joe DiMaggio continued his career with the Yankees. Other well known players in the post-war years included: Yogi Berra, Phil Rizzuto, Carl Furillo, Sal Maglie, Vic Raschi, Roy Campanella, Dom DiMaggio, Ernie Lombardi, Joe Pepitone, Rico Petrocelli, Sal Bando, Rocky Colavito, and Tony Conigliaro.

In college football, Joe Paterno became one of the most successful coaches ever. Seven Italian American players won the Heisman Trophy: Angelo Bertelli of Notre Dame, Alan Ameche of Wisconsin, Gary Beban of UCLA, Joe Bellino of Navy, John Cappelletti of Penn State, Gino Torretta of Miami, and Vinny Testaverde of Miami.

In professional football, Vince Lombardi set the standard of excellence for all coaches to follow. Numerous Italian Americans were outstanding players of the era, including: Alan Ameche, Leo Nomellini, Andy Robustelli, Franco Harris, Charlie Trippi, Gino Marchetti, Joe Fortunato, Babe Parilli, Dan Pastorini, Dante Lavelli, Gino Cappelletti, John Cappelletti, Mike Lucci, Brian Piccolo, Vince Ferragamo, Daryl Lamonica, Joe Montana, Dan Marino and Vinny Testaverde.

In boxing, Rocky Marciano was the undefeated heavyweight champion from 1952 to 1956. Carmen Basilio, Rocky Graziano and Jake LaMotta were middleweight champions. Ray Mancini and Vinny Pazienza were lightweight champions. Willie Pep was a featherweight champion. Angelo Dundee trained 15 world champion boxers, including Mohammad Ali.

In golf, Ken Venturi won both the British and U.S. Open championships in 1956. Donna Caponi won the U.S. Women's Open championships in 1969 and 1970.

In Olympic competition, Mary Lou Retton won the all-around gold medal in woman's gymnastics. Matt Biondi won a total of 8 gold medals in Olympic swimming competition. Brian Boitano won a gold medal in men's singles figure skating. Linda Fratianne won a silver medal in woman's singles figure skating.

Many Italian Americans actors became well known in movies and TV – such as Don Ameche, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Ann Bancroft, Ernest Borgnine, Robert Alda, Alan Alda, Lou Costello, Frank Langella, Frankie Avalon, Annette Funicello, James Darren, Jimmy Durante, Anthony Franciosa, Sal Mineo, Ben Gazzara, Harry Guardino, Aldo Ray, Richard Conte, Dom Deluise, Armand Assante, Susan Sarandon, Danny DiVito, Joe Montegna, John Travolta, Tony Danza, Alyssa Milano, Paul Sorvino, Mira Sorvino, Al Pacino, Liza Minelli, Rene Russo, Robert DiNiro, Nicholas Cage, Marissa Tomei and Sylvester Stallone.

Italian Americans were highly successful movie directors. Frank Capra directed the classic movie "It's a Wonderful Life" in 1946. Vincente Minelli directed a number of major box-office successes, including "Gigi" and "An American in Paris". Later in the century, a new generation of directors arose, the best known being Francis Coppola, Martin Scorsese and Michael Cimino - all three becoming Academy Award winners.

Italian Americans founded a number of well known business enterprises, including: Barnes and Noble, Tropicana, Zamboni, Subway, Blimpie's, Castro Convertible Sofas, Prince Pasta, American Italian Pasta, Mr. Coffee, Conair, and the Macaroni Grill and Carrabba Restaurant chains. Other enterprises founded by Italian Americans were Farleigh-Dickenson University, and the Syracuse Nationals basketball team - later to become the Philadelphia 76-ers.

Italians continued to immigrate after the war, and an estimated 600,000 came into the country in the post-war decades. Many were well educated men and women who had come seeking greater opportunities in their chosen fields. Among these were four who were destined to become Noble Prize winners: Salvatore Luria, Renato Dulbecco, Rita Levi-Montalcini and Riccardo Giacconi

Contemporary period

A century after the period of peak immigration, Italian Americans had achieved education, employment and income parity with Americans in general. They had excelled in all fields of endeavor, and had made substantial contributions in virtually all areas of American life and culture:

Italian Americans had fought with distinction in all of America's wars. Over three dozen had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the most recent being Salvatore Giunta for service in Afghanistan. A number of Italian Americans were serving as top-ranking generals in the Army, including Anthony Zinni, Raymond Ordierno, Carl Vuono and Peter Pace, the latter two having also served as Army Chief of Staff.

Over two dozen of Italian descent had been elected as state governors, most recently George Pataki of New York, Paul Callucci of Massachusetts, John Balducci of Maine, Janet Napolitano of Arizona, Donald Carcieri of Rhode Island, Joseph Manchin of West Virginia, Christopher Christie of New Jersey, and Andrew Cuomo of New York.

A score or more Italian Americans, beginning with Charles Bonaparte in the Teddy Roosevelt administration, and continuing with Leon Pannetta and Janet Napolitano in the Obama administration, had been appointed to Cabinet positions. John Podesta and Leon Panetta had served in the capacity of White House Chief of Staff.

At the close of the 20th century, 31 men and woman of Italian descent were serving in the U.S. Congress and Senate - including Nancy Pelosi, who was the first woman in American history to become Speaker of the House.

Two Italian Americans, Antonin Scalia and Samuel Alito, were serving as Supreme Court justices.

Over two dozen Italian Americans were serving in the Catholic Church as Bishops. Three - Joseph Bernardin, Justin Regali and Anthony Bevilacqua - had been elevated to Cardinals.

At the close of the 20th century, according to the National Italian American Foundation, 82 of the largest 1000 cities had mayors of Italian descent, and 166 college and university presidents were of Italian descent.

In less than a century, Italian Americans had risen into the highest ranks of politics, the judiciary, business, the professions, the military and the Catholic hierarchy. They were counted among the country's best known sports and entertainment figures.

Demographics

In the 2000 U.S. Census, Italian Americans constituted the fifth largest ancestry group in America with about 15.6 million people, 5.6% of the total U.S. population.^[12] Sicilian Americans are a subset of numerous Americans of regional Italian ancestries. As of 2006, the U.S. Census estimated the Italian-American population at 17.8 million persons, or 6% of the population,^[13] ^[14] constituting a 14% increase over the six year period.

Politics

In the 1930s, Italian Americans voted heavily Democratic.^[15]

Since 1968, voters have split about evenly between the Democratic (37%) and the Republican (36%) parties.^[16] The U.S. Congress includes Italian Americans who are regarded as leaders in both the Republican and Democratic parties. The highest ranking Italian American politician is currently Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) who became the first woman and Italian American Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. Former Republican New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani was a candidate for the U.S. presidency in the 2008 election, as was Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo. Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman on a major party ticket, running for Vice President as a Democrat in 1984. Two of the justices of the Supreme Court—Antonin Scalia and Samuel Alito—are Italian-Americans, appointed by Republican presidents.^[17] Both vote as members of the conservative wing of the court, along with Clarence Thomas and Chief Justice John Roberts. The Second Lady, Dr. Jill Jacobs Biden's father's family name was originally Giacoppa.^[18]

The Italian American Congressional Delegation currently includes 30 members of Congress who trace their ancestry back to Italy. They are joined by more than 150 associate members who are not Italian American, but have an interest in the Italian American community. Since its founding in 1975, the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) has worked closely with the bicameral and bipartisan Italian American Congressional Delegation, which is led by co-chairs Rep. Bill Pascrell of New Jersey and Rep. Pat Tiberi of Ohio. For more information on the National Italian American Foundation, visit [\[19\]](#).

The National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) hosts a variety of public policy programs, contributing to public discourse on timely policy issues facing the nation and the world. These events are held on Capitol Hill and other locations under the auspices of NIAF's Frank J. Guarini Public Policy Forum and its sister program, the NIAF Public Policy Lecture Series. NIAF's 2009 public policy programs on Capitol Hill featured prominent Italians and Italian Americans as keynote speakers including Leon Panetta, Director of the CIA, and Franco Frattini, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Italy.



Logo of Sons of Italy, which is the largest Italian American fraternal organization in the United States.

By the 1890s Italian Americans in New York City were mobilizing as a political force. They helped elect Fiorello La Guardia (a Republican) as mayor in 1933, and helped reelected him in 1937, and 1941. They rallied for Vincent R. Impellitteri (a Democrat) in 1950, and Rudolph W. Giuliani (a Republican) in 1989 (when he lost) and in 1993 and 1997 (when he won). All three Italian Americans aggressively fought to reduce crime in the city; each was known for his good relations with the city's powerful labor unions.^[20] La Guardia and Giuliani have the reputation among specialists on urban politics as two of the best mayors in American history.^{[21] [22]}

Business and economy

Italian-Americans have served an important role in the economy of the United States, and have founded companies of great national importance, such as Bank of America (by Amadeo Giannini in 1904), and companies that have contributed to the local culture and character of U.S. cities, such as Petrini's Markets (founded by Frank Petrini in 1935), among many others. Italian-Americans have also made important contributions to the growth of the U.S. economy through their business expertise, such as the management of Ford Motor Company and the Chrysler Corporation by Lee Iacocca.

Workers

About two thirds of America's Italian immigrants arrived during 1900-24. Having little education or training, most of them became unskilled laborers heavily concentrated in the cities. The 1970 census revealed, however, that those of the second generation under age 45 had achieved a level of education approaching the national average.^[3] While 71% of the second generation men had blue collar jobs, the proportion was down to 52% in the third generation, according to surveys in 1963.^[23]

Women

Those in the Italian communities were often poor, but married women typically avoided factory work and chose home-based economic activities such as dressmaking, taking in boarders, and operating small shops in their homes or neighborhoods. Italian neighborhoods also proved attractive to midwives, women who trained in Italy before seeking work in America. Unlike shopkeepers or factory workers, midwives largely chose careers before leaving Italy and shaped their lives around work rather than their work around their lives.^[24]

Italian women fared better in western cities like Denver and San Francisco than did their compatriots in eastern urban centers. Italian women in the first two generations stayed largely within the Little Italy. Married women worked within their homes or in family-owned businesses while single women held jobs in light industry, but often only temporarily. In the third generation, women who came of age during the 1940s-1950s, opportunities expanded as women gradually were accepted in the workplace and as entrepreneurs. Third-generation women also had much better job opportunities because they had a high school or college education and were willing to leave Little Italy and commute to work.^[25]