



Hollywood's 10 Greatest Actors: Humphrey Bogart, Cary Grant, Jimmy Stewart, Marlon Brando, Fred Astaire, Henry Fonda, Clark Gable, James Cagney, Spencer Tracy, and Charlie Chaplin

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures.

*Includes actors' quotes about their careers.

*Includes bibliographies.

In 1999, the American Film Institute released its list of the 50 greatest Hollywood stars of the 20th century, and selecting the 10 best actors out of the bunch was certainly a tall task. The competition was so stacked that men like Gary Cooper and John Wayne were not even among the Top 10. So who were the Top 10 men selected by the AFI?

One man has long been considered the greatest male star. From the time he first became a leading man, Humphrey Bogart's screen image has resonated with viewers more than perhaps any other actor. His persona as a tough guy who manages to maintain his sense of virtue no matter how compromising the situation features in some of the most famous films ever made, including *Casablanca* (1942), *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), and *Key Largo* (1949).

Movie stars are revered for their ability to captivate audiences, and perhaps no actor has done it as well as Cary Grant, the epitome of the suave, debonair actor who may have been rivaled only by dancer extraordinaire Fred Astaire. Grant offered a version of the male actor that stood in stark contrast with the gangster heroes and hard-boiled film noir detectives that populated the screen throughout his career.

If the list was reconstructed today, it is entirely possible that Stewart would rank first. Not only have movies such as *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *Vertigo* (1958) continued to gain in popularity even into the 21st century, but Stewart has come to embody an accessible image of American values that is easy for everyone to embrace.

Over the course of his long, prolific career, Marlon Brando was considered perhaps the greatest actor of the 20th century as well as one of the most complicated and misunderstood. Uniquely able to be both emotionally charged and technically constrained in the same performance, he single-handedly changed the direction of not only the American style of acting, influencing successors such as Robert De Niro, Al Pacino and even Johnny Depp, but the acting profession on a global scale.

Virtually all famous actors are regaled by the public, but even still, Fred Astaire occupies a privileged position in American pop culture. The specific films in which Astaire acted may not be especially famous in their own right, but Astaire's dancing prowess invariably creates a lasting impact on viewers.

Among all of Hollywood's iconic leading men, arguably none proved as versatile at acting as Henry Fonda, whose career spanned six decades and earned him Academy Awards for roles in various genres. A lot of Fonda's success could be attributed to the fact that he could convincingly play the all-American man that everybody in the nation adored and/or wanted to be.

Best known for his role in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), Clark Gable had a unique appeal that captivated Depression-era audiences; while Cary Grant offered a sophisticated charm and Fred Astaire was tied to the musical genre, Gable brought an air of sophistication that was less comical than that of Grant and appealed to

both genders, unlike Astaire.

Ultimately, it was portraying tough guys and gangsters in the 1930s that turned James Cagney into a massive Hollywood star. In movies like *The Public Enemy* (which included the infamous “grapefruit scene”) and *White Heat*, Cagney convincingly played criminals that brought Warner to the forefront of Hollywood. After joining MGM in 1935, Tracy catapulted to fame with one of the most impressive runs in Hollywood history, winning Oscars for Best Actor in 1938 and 1939 after already being nominated in 1937.

Charlie Chaplin was the first true film star, and he managed to do so even when films were still silent. He has been honored with too many awards to count, and the fact that his name remains instantly recognizable nearly a century after his first film is a testament to his influence.

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