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American Film Institute Top 25 Female Stars



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25 names

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1. **Katharine Hepburn**

Actress | [The Lion in Winter](#)

Katharine Hepburn was born on May 12, 1907 in Hartford, Connecticut to a suffragist and a doctor who both always encouraged her to speak her mind, develop it fully, and exercise her body to its full potential. An athletic tomboy as a child, she was very close to her brother Tom; at 14 she was ...



2. **Bette Davis**

Actress | [All About Eve](#)

Ruth Elizabeth Davis was born April 5, 1908, in Lowell, Massachusetts, to Ruth Augusta (Favor) and Harlow Morrell Davis, a patent attorney. Her parents divorced when she was 10. She and her sister were raised by their mother. Her early interest was dance. To Bette, dancers led a glamorous life, but...



3. **Audrey Hepburn**

Actress | [Breakfast at Tiffany's](#)

Audrey Hepburn was born as Audrey Kathleen Ruston on May 4, 1929 in Ixelles, Brussels, Belgium. Her mother, [Baroness Ella Van Heemstra](#), was a Dutch noblewoman, while her father, Joseph Victor Anthony Ruston, was born in Úzice, Bohemia, to English and Austrian parents.

After her parents' divorce, ...

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Black Best Actor and Actress

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4. **Ingrid Bergman**

Actress | [Casablanca](#)

Ingrid Bergman was one of the greatest actresses from Hollywood's lamented Golden Era. Her natural and unpretentious beauty and her immense acting talent made her one of the most celebrated figures in the history of American cinema. Bergman is also one of the most Oscar-awarded actresses, tied with ...



5. **Greta Garbo**

Actress | [Ninotchka](#)

Greta Garbo was born Greta Lovisa Gustafsson on September 18, 1905, in Stockholm, Sweden, to Anna Lovisa (Johansdotter), who worked at a jam factory, and Karl Alfred Gustafsson, a laborer. She was fourteen when her father died, which left the family destitute. Greta was forced to leave school and ...



6. **Marilyn Monroe**

Actress | [Some Like It Hot](#)

Marilyn Monroe was an American actress, comedienne, singer, and model. She became one of the world's most enduring iconic figures and is remembered both for her winsome embodiment of the Hollywood sex symbol and her tragic personal and professional struggles within the film industry. Her life and ...



7. Elizabeth Taylor

Actress | [Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?](#)

Elizabeth Rosemond Taylor was considered one of the last, if not the last, major star to have come out of the old Hollywood studio system. She was known internationally for her beauty, especially for her violet eyes, with which she captured audiences early on in her youth and kept the world hooked ...



8. Judy Garland

Actress | [The Wizard of Oz](#)

One of the brightest, most tragic movie stars of Hollywood's Golden Era, [Judy Garland](#) was a much-loved character whose warmth and spirit, along with her rich and exuberant voice, kept theatre-goers entertained with an array of delightful musicals.

She was born Frances Ethel Gumm on 10 June 1922 in ...



9. Marlene Dietrich

Soundtrack | [Witness for the Prosecution](#)

Her father was a police lieutenant and imbued in her a military attitude to life. Marlene was known in school for her "bedroom eyes" and her first affairs were at this stage in her life - a professor at the school was terminated. She entered the cabaret scene in 1920s Germany, first as a spectator ...



10. **Joan Crawford**

Actress | [What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?](#)

Joan Crawford was born Lucille Fay LeSueur on March 23, 1904, in San Antonio, Texas, to Anna Belle (Johnson) and Thomas E. LeSueur, a laundry laborer. By the time she was born, her parents had separated, and by the time she was a teenager, she'd had three stepfathers. It wasn't an easy life; ...



11. **Barbara Stanwyck**

Actress | [Double Indemnity](#)

Today Barbara Stanwyck is remembered primarily as the matriarch of the family known as the Barkleys on the TV western [The Big Valley](#) (1965), wherein she played Victoria, and from the hit drama [The Colbys](#) (1985). But she was known to millions of other fans for her movie career, which spanned the ...



12. **Claudette Colbert**

Actress | [It Happened One Night](#)

One of the brightest film stars to grace the screen was born Emilie Claudette Chauchoin on September 13, 1903, in Saint Mandé, France where her father owned a bakery at 57, rue de la République (now Avenue Général de Gaulle). The family moved to the United States when she was three. As Claudette ...



13. **Grace Kelly**

Actress | [Dial M for Murder](#)

On November 12, 1929, Grace Patricia Kelly was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to wealthy parents. Her girlhood was uneventful for the most part, but one of the things she desired was to become an actress which she had decided on at an early age. After her high school graduation in 1947, Grace ...



14. **Ginger Rogers**

Actress | [Kitty Foyle](#)

Ginger Rogers was born Virginia Katherine McMath in Independence, Missouri on July 16, 1911. Her mother, known as Lelee, went to Independence to have Ginger away from her husband. She had a baby earlier in their marriage and he allowed the doctor to use forceps and the baby died. She was kidnapped ...



15. **Mae West**

Actress | [She Done Him Wrong](#)

[Mae West](#) was born August 17, 1893 in Brooklyn, New York, to "Battling Jack" West and Matilda Doelger. She began her career as a child star in vaudeville, and later went on to write her own plays, including "SEX", for which she was arrested. Though her first movie role, at age 40, was a small part ...



16. **Vivien Leigh**

Actress | [A Streetcar Named Desire](#)

If a film were made of the life of Vivien Leigh, it would open in India just before World War I, where a successful British businessman could live like a prince. In the mountains above Calcutta, a little princess is born. Because of the outbreak of World War I, she is six years old the first time ...



17. **Lillian Gish**

Actress | [The Night of the Hunter](#)

Lillian Diana Gish was born on October 14, 1893, in Springfield, Ohio. Her father, James Lee Gish, was an alcoholic who caroused, was rarely at home., and left the family to, more or less, fend for themselves. To help make ends meet, Lillian, her sister [Dorothy Gish](#), and their mother, [Mary Gish](#), ...



18. **Shirley Temple**

Actress | [The Little Colonel](#)

Shirley Temple was easily the most popular and famous child star of all time. She got her start in the movies at the age of three and soon progressed to super stardom. Shirley could do it all: act, sing and dance and all at the age of five! Fans loved her as she was bright, bouncy and cheerful in ...



19. **Rita Hayworth**

Actress | [Gilda](#)

Rita Hayworth was born Margarita Carmen Cansino on October 17, 1918, in Brooklyn, New York, into a family of dancers. Her father, [Eduardo Cansino](#) Reina, was a dancer as was his father before him. He emigrated from Spain in 1913. Rita's American mother, Volga Margaret (Hayworth), who was of mostly ...



20. **Lauren Bacall**

Actress | [To Have and Have Not](#)

Lauren Bacall was born Betty Joan Perske on September 16, 1924, in New York City. She was the daughter of Natalie Weinstein-Bacal, a Romanian Jewish immigrant, and William Perske, who was born in New Jersey, to Polish Jewish parents. Her family was middle-class, with her father working as a ...



21. **Sophia Loren**

Actress | [La ciociara](#)

Sophia Loren was born as Sofia Scicolone at the Clinica Regina Margherita in Rome on September 20, 1934. Her father Riccardo was married to another woman and refused to marry her mother [Romilda Villani](#), despite the fact that she was the mother of his two children (Sophia and her younger sister ...



22. **Jean Harlow**

Actress | [Suzy](#)

Harlean Carpenter, who later became Jean Harlow, was born in Kansas City, Missouri, on March 3, 1911. She was the daughter of a successful dentist and his wife. In 1927, at the age of 16, she ran away from home to marry a young businessman named Charles McGrew, who was 23. The couple pulled up ...



23. **Carole Lombard**

Actress | [To Be or Not to Be](#)

Carole Lombard was born Jane Alice Peters in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on October 6, 1908. Her parents divorced in 1916 and her mother took the family on a trip out West. While there they decided to settle down in the Los Angeles area. After being spotted playing baseball in the street with the ...



24. **Mary Pickford**

Actress | [Coquette](#)

Mary Pickford was born Gladys Marie Smith in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, to Elsie Charlotte (Hennessy) and John Charles Smith. She was of English and Irish descent. Pickford began in the theater at age seven. Then known as "Baby Gladys Smith", she toured with her family in a number of theater ...



25. **Ava Gardner**

Actress | [The Night of the Iguana](#)

Ava Lavina Gardner was born on December 24, 1922 in Grabtown, North Carolina, to Mary Elizabeth (née Baker) and Jonas Bailey Gardner. Born on a tobacco farm, where she got her lifelong love of earthy language and going barefoot, Ava grew up in the rural South. At age 18, her picture in the window ...

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