Wells Fargo reported profits of $12.36 billion last year, and sits at number 23 on the Fortune list, just above Procter & Gamble. The California-headquartered bank acquired Wachovia, which had itself previously absorbed First Union and the Money Store among others, in 2008, in the throes of the financial meltdown, and as of 2010 has $1.26 trillion in assets and $93 billion in revenues.

Goldman Sachs, the famed "vampire squid" in Matt Taibbi's formulation, is the only investment bank on our list. However, no look at the corrupting influence of Big Finance would be complete without it. It's "only" at 54 on Fortune's list, but still higher than, among others, Intel, Chrysler and Sears, with $911.3 billion in assets and $46 billion in revenues, and profits of $8.35 billion in 2010. For many, Goldman Sachs is the face of all that's wrong with Wall Street, stoking massive anger when CEO Lloyd Blankfein told a reporter that he was "doing God's work."

Meet Their Bailouts

The big banks weathered the economic crash thanks to large injections of taxpayer dollars. The original bailout plan, the Troubled Asset Relief Program, was signed into law by George W. Bush and gave direct handouts to the banks to keep them from collapsing.

Economist Dean Baker told AlterNet that Big Finance "never wanted to see the removal of the government from the market. They wanted the government to come in and bail them out."

They were also happy to accept "government deposit insurance or the back-up lines of credit provided by the Fed through the discount window," he said. "What the financial industry wants is to have these incredibly valuable government safeguards without restrictions on the banks' behavior."

Among our big five, Citigroup was the largest beneficiary of these funds, with $45 billion, but even Goldman Sachs got $10 billion.

The size of the financial industry alone is worrisome. As Katrina vanden Heuvel pointed out at the Washington Post, "Obama has said that we can't go back to an economy where the banks make 40 percent of all corporate profits. ***http://tinyurl.com/3nhwlno*** But the big banks are emerging from the crisis more concentrated than ever, and financial sector profits are already up to nearly 30 percent of total corporate profits." Banking, like trucking, is known as an "intermediary good" -- nothing is produced by the industry – and if any other intermediary good represented around 10 percent of the U.S. economy, people would consider that a major problem.

To create those complex financial instruments, finance has begun to cannibalize the "best and brightest" college graduates--or at least those looking for the fattest paychecks, whether purely out of greed or a need to pay off heavy student loan burdens (often owed to the same banks). ***http://tinyurl.com/3q7kpdh***

Pat Garofalo at Think Progress noted that "The four biggest banks issue 50 percent of mortgages and 66 percent of credit cards: Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo and Citigroup issue one out of every two mortgages and nearly two out of every three credit cards in America." Not only that, but he also pointed out that the five banks we've tracked here are the ones that control 95 percent of the derivatives in the country--the complex financial instruments that investor Warren Buffet called "financial Weapons of Mass Destruction." ***http://tinyurl.com/3jycton***

Perhaps the most pernicious effect of Wall Street's influence is yet to come. By watering down or killing off new regulations designed to prevent the next bubble-induced meltdown, they imperil future generations' prosperity just as they did when they lobbied hard to kill financial regulations in the 1990s--resulting in, to give one example, the passage of the Commodity Futures Modernization Act in 2000, which kept derivatives and credit default swaps unregulated and allowed the banks to keep gambling without oversight.

The banks have simply gotten too powerful; "too big to fail" has