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'Most dangerous' label strikes Camden again - This time, the city was ready for the controversial rating. Philadelphia and Upper Darby fared much better.

Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA) - Monday, November 21, 2005

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The numbers did not work in Camden's favor.

Just as its officials had feared, New Jersey's poorest city has been designated America's most dangerous city for a second year in a row in a statistical survey released today.

According to the Kansas-based publisher Morgan Quitno, Camden had the highest violent crime, homicide and robbery rates among all cities with populations of 75,000 or more. It is followed on the list by Detroit; St. Louis; Flint, Mich.; Richmond Va.; and Baltimore. Philadelphia ranked 33d.

A spike in homicides and aggravated assaults in 2004 contributed to Camden's No. 1 ranking.

The national homicide rate in 2004 was 5.5 per 100,000. In Camden, the rate topped out at 60.8 per 100,000 - more than 10 times the national rate. By comparison, Philadelphia's homicide rate in 2004 was 22.2 per 100,000.

The ranking is controversial, not least of all in Camden, where it has placed a multimillion-dollar redevelopment effort in jeopardy and caused enrollment to dip at Rutgers University's Camden campus.

At least this year, the ranking did not come as a complete surprise, and Camden officials already have launched a counteroffensive, arguing that the numbers are old and do not reflect the city as it is today.

"I think the city is a little bit better prepared this year," said Derek Ziegler, executive director for **CAMConnect**, a nonprofit organization that analyzes data about Camden. "I've been telling people since the beginning of the year that this was on its way."

Ziegler ran FBI statistics using Morgan Quitno's methodology and determined weeks ago that the city would be No. 1.

"I think the numbers are interesting as a conversation starter," Ziegler said, "but I don't think it's fair to compare Camden to much bigger cities like Detroit and Baltimore."

A rally in support of Camden is planned for this morning at Antioch Baptist Church in South Camden.

Morgan Quitno also released the flip side to the most dangerous ranking this morning. It named three South Jersey communities among America's safest cities: Brick Township came in at No. 5, Dover Township at No. 15, and Hamilton Township at No. 18. Upper

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Darby, at 89th, was the top Pennsylvania city on the safest list. Newton, Mass., is No. 1.

Scott Morgan, the executive editor of Morgan Quitno, said the company's Web site received more than a million hits the day the rankings were released last year. After the announcement was covered by CNN, the BBC and Japanese television, the Web site was accessed so many times that it caused the server to crash.

Last year's ranking brought some unforeseen benefits to the city. In the month after the announcement, federal and state law enforcement officials pledged to devote more resources to Camden.

They made good on some of their promises. A U.S. Marshal's task force tracked down and captured more than 225 of Camden's most violent fugitives. Rewards of \$1,000 were offered to citizens who tipped authorities to dangerous felons. The city Police Department underwent a major reorganization. Law enforcement agencies cooperated across the city, county, state and federal levels.

And the promises have had results. Overall crime in Camden is down 18 percent to date, Camden County Prosecutor Vincent P. Sarubbi said.

Publisher Morgan chuckled when apprised of his list's unintended consequences.

"I find it interesting that it took being No. 1 to do that," Morgan said, noting Camden has consistently placed in the top 10 every year during the last decade. "It seems as though it's OK to be fourth or fifth most dangerous, but when you become No. 1, things suddenly become quite dramatic."

The method Morgan Quitno uses to determine the rankings is attacked regularly by criminologists and sociologists, who criticize the company for not placing the data in context.

John Allen Paulos, author of *Innumeracy: Mathematical Illiteracy and Its Consequences* and a professor of mathematics at Temple, labeled the company's methodology "incomprehensible."

It "calls for a new category of crime: statisticide," Paulos said. "I think they should be sentenced to a course in probability and statistics."

Under its methodology, Morgan Quitno gives equal weight to six basic crime categories reported by the FBI: homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary and motor-vehicle theft.

One city activist said that regardless of the publisher's methods, he was thankful that the ranking had brought resources to the beleaguered city.

"Being focused on the exact methodology obscures the fundamental problems going on in Camden," Jeff Brenner said. "It's a very dangerous city with enormous public safety problems, and we have a long way to go to make it a safe place for families, children and businesses to thrive.

"The only way we'll make change in Camden is by bringing a spotlight to the problem."

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Caption: CHART

Most Dangerous and Safest Cities (SOURCE: Morgan Quitno Press; The Philadelphia Inquirer)

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