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ORANGE COUNTY PERSPECTIVE

Together, and United, We Stand

The Los Angeles riots sent shivers through every urban area faced with similar ethnic and economic problems, including Orange County. What can be done to avoid the buildup of such tensions here? The answers aren't easy, but one thing is clear: Doing nothing is the worst option. That's why it's good to see the formation of Orange County Together, which aspires to make diversity work for the betterment of the community.

The group was brought together by the Orange County Human Relations Commission with the help of a two-year, \$100,000 grant from Orange County United Way.

It is composed of about 60 community, corporate, ethnic, law enforcement and religious leaders, as well as other con-

cerned citizens. Its purpose is to "shape a just community where all are valued and included." No small task, that.

One immediate goal of the group is to open lines of communication among the widely divergent communities of interest in the county. But that will not be enough. Ways must be developed to make more of a difference in people's lives.

United Way's leadership is vitally important to this effort. For one thing, its grant allowed for the hiring of a staff coordinator.

United Way also is helping attract business leaders who will be important to the success of the effort. Orange County Together represents United Way's commitment to expand beyond its institution-

al role to help residents deal with the many demographic changes the county is undergoing.

The challenges to the new group are many. Even the group's size, while important because of its inclusiveness, will test its ability to stay on track. And no one wants to end up merely with a report that does little but gather dust on someone's shelf.

Still, the potential for helping the county confront its problems is promising. It would be easy for Orange County to lull itself into believing that urban riots couldn't happen here. Instead, its leaders are using the acrid memory of last April's conflagration as a keen reminder that ethnic tensions are ignored at everyone's peril.