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# Career groove

## As Montel opens in play with Mia Farrow, acting moves center stage

By MICHAEL GILTZ

**D**ON'T assume that because Montel Williams is performing in "The Exonerated" — a play about wrongly convicted people on death row — that he is opposed to capital

punishment. "It doesn't require you to be anti-death penalty," says Williams, who performs the hit Off-Broadway show with Mia Farrow and Billy Dee Williams in the Hamptons starting next week.

"It requires you to be extremely critical of the system that employs it," he says. "That's what my issue is. I've never been

anti-death penalty. But I think there should be a moratorium on the death penalty until this nation employs it the right way."

A former Marine and motivational speaker, Williams begins the 13th season of his talk show in September — after taking a quick snowboarding vacation in Chile, wrapping up a book about the latest on multiple sclerosis (he was diagnosed just four years ago) and firming up plans to continue his recurring role on the NBC drama "American Dreams" as Rev. Gillian.

Acting in "The Exonerated," which he says invariably moves audiences to tears, is just one example of how the 47-year-old Williams avoids being pigeonholed.

"I know I'm going to be scrutinized way more than the average person because somebody's going to say, 'Who the hell does he think he is?'" says Williams.

"But I think I've legitimately shown I've got the chops," says Williams, whose acting career included a prime-time drama, "Matt Waters," he produced and starred in, as well as appearances on "JAG," "All My Children" and "Touched By An Angel."

"At least I think I do."

The justice system — especially the ways it can be distorted and abused by a scandal-hungry media — is his passion.

"Let's take a look right this

minute at what's going with Kobe Bryant," says Williams, who contends the term "social journalism" is probably closer to what he does than "talk show."

"If there's not a clearer exam-



Calls his show "social journalism."



Montel Williams' acting career is threatening to overtake his daily talk show.

ple of injustice in America ... I feel I need to call some of my peers and say, 'Back off until there's at least some evidence, where at least the trial begins.'

"I wonder what happens if Kobe Bryant is innocent. If he's guilty, then lock him up, throw away the key. Period. I have no problem with that.

"But let's wait. This kid's Constitutional rights are being abused by us in the media. And we need to stop."

"No matter what happens when it's all said and done, if he's exonerated, he will have a cloud of rapist over his head. And that will last until the day the man dies. And that is absolutely an abomination."