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# Texas killer gets a pass on death row

## Judge declares inmate's appeals ignored 20 years

By PEGGY O'HARE  
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Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
A judge ruled that Rulford Garfield Aldridge wasn't mentally competent to stand trial.

A federal district court ruled this week that a Houston man on Texas death row for 20 years for killing his boss during a robbery was not



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mentally competent to stand trial back in 1990 and ordered his release within 180 days unless the Harris County District Attorney's Office plans to retry him.

In a strongly worded opinion, U.S. District Judge Gray Miller said the state had forfeited its right to act on Rulford Garfield Aldridge's case by failing to acknowledge his appeals.

"It is unconscionable that full inquiry into Aldridge's mental state has taken two decades," Miller wrote in his ruling this week.

Lawyers for Aldridge, also known as Salim El-Anwar Shabazz, called the ruling an "extraordinary development" that is "highly unusual."

"It really is amazing after being on death row for 20 years to finally have a court listen and evaluate what should have been considered initially," Aldridge's appellate attorney, Philip Hilder, said Friday. "The heart of the ruling is that Mr. Aldridge was never competent to stand trial."

Aldridge, now 56, was convicted of capital murder and sentenced to death for robbing and fatally shooting his boss, 32-year-old Ben Stone, twice in the back of the head at the McDonald's restaurant where they worked on Jan. 3, 1990. Several psychologists have concluded over the years that Aldridge suffers from paranoid schizophrenia.

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