

Crystal Mangum was released Feb. 27 from the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women after serving nearly 13 years for second-degree murder in the 2013 stabbing death of her boyfriend.

Mangum's release renews attention on the 2006 Duke lacrosse rape case, in which she falsely accused three players of assault. The allegations exposed racial and class tensions in Durham and created national debate over media coverage and due process and ultimately led to the players' exoneration and the disbarment of the then District Attorney Mike Nifong.

"There was a lot going on underneath the surface," said Tamara Gibbs-Franklin, a local journalist who covered the case. "This case had racial undertones. It had class undertones... You also have a city that is economically struggling for some communities, and so there was tension there."

Mangum, who worked as an exotic dancer, was hired in March 2006 to perform at a party at the Durham residence of two Duke lacrosse team captains. She later told police she had been sexually assaulted by three players in a bathroom during the party.

"I'm not who they say I am. I'm not lying. Something did happen to me," Mangum wrote in her 2008 book, "A Last Dance for Grace: The Crystal Mangum Story."

Duke lacrosse players Reade Seligmann, Collin Finnerty and David Evans were charged with multiple crimes, including rape. However, DNA testing failed to link any of the players to Mangum.

At the time, Durham County District Attorney Mike Nifong was running for reelection and aggressively pursued the case. He was later disbarred for withholding DNA evidence from defense attorneys and making improper public statements about the case.

In April 2007, then Attorney General Roy Cooper took control of the case and dismissed all charges, declaring the three players innocent after an independent review of the evidence. "As attorney general, it was important for me to take that case from the local prosecutor and do an investigation to find the real truth," Cooper said at the time.

In a 2024 podcast interview, Mangum apologized to the former players and acknowledged fabricating the allegations. "They were my brothers, and they trusted me that I wouldn't betray their trust," she said, expressing hope that they could forgive her.

Despite Mangum's apology, the effects of this case continue to be felt by the accused players and the city of Durham. "This woman has destroyed everything I worked for in my life... Worst of

all, she's split apart a community and a nation on facts that just didn't happen," said former Duke lacrosse player David Evans.

Mangum's family also faced backlash from the scandal. "I just remember my teachers being meaner, not all of them, but I remember a few specific ones just being really nasty – and it was kind of like a 180, because they weren't like that before," said Mangum's youngest daughter, Torelli, who was in elementary school at the time.

As Mangum begins life outside prison, her release has renewed attention to a case that continues to influence conversations about justice, media coverage and race in Durham nearly two decades later.