Cruel Justice tells the compelling story of the law, which began as the brainchild of a father whose daughter was brutally murdered in front of a neighborhood restaurant. In 1992, Kimber Reynolds was just 18 when she was shot in the head by a man who was attempting to steal her purse.

From that moment forward, Mike Reynolds vowed to avenge his daughter’s death. His plan was to change California law, making any criminal with two prior felony convictions eligible for the maximum 25-years-to-life sentence upon commission of a third felony or “strike.”

Support for this legislation increased dramatically when a second brutal murder occurred in 1993. This was the case of 12-year-old Polly Klaas, who was abducted one night from her own bedroom. She was strangled to death by her kidnapper, and her body was later found hidden inside an abandoned warehouse.

The Klaas case was just the fuel that Mike Reynolds needed to fan the fire of enthusiasm for his three-strikes bill. Marc Klaas initially supported three strikes, but ultimately, Polly Klaas’ father came to realize that because of its far reaching nature, three strikes could actually cause more harm than good as far as justice was concerned.

Cruel Justice explains in great detail how the three-strikes law, born in a climate of extreme fear, brought on in part by these two horrific murders, seemed like the answer to California’s alarmingly high crime rate. Support for the bill was achieved largely by playing upon those fears and by exploiting the murder of Polly Klaas.

In Cruel Justice, Domanick demonstrates that justice has not been served by the three-strikes law, because, ultimately, many criminals were given 25-years-to-life sentences for crimes as insignificant as petty theft with a prior and simple drug possession. In fact, almost 50% of the prisoners serving under the three-strikes law had committed third strikes that were non-serious and nonviolent.

The book paints a very grim picture of the current system of justice in California. By uncovering the truth behind the state’s three-strikes law, Cruel Justice provides the reader with a clear understanding that to a great extent, under the three-strikes law California courts can no longer profess to be administering justice per se.

Cruel Justice provides a comprehensive and revealing analysis of the many factors involved in the creation and implementation of the three-strikes law. By far the most interesting part of the story, however, is the real human drama behind three strikes, particularly the personal agenda of the law’s greatest proponent, Mike Reynolds.

In contrast to the stories of the victims’ families, Domanick also profiles the lives of some of the people who have been affected the most by three strikes—the criminals and their families. He also touches upon the struggles of three-strikes reform advocates, who have thus far attempted unsuccessfully to change any part of the three-strikes law.