

I am the law: how Judge Dredd predicted our future by Michael Molcher, Oxford

Rebellion Developments, 2023, 208 pp., £14.99 RRP (Paperback) ISBN: 978-1786185709.

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Malicious, oppressive, and corrupt police officers frequently feature as part and parcel of the gritty and dystopian comic book world. From the vicious riot cops in *Transmetropolitan*, to the proliferation of ‘dirty’ cops in the Gotham City Police Department, to the police force controlling the city in the *Akira* manga, comic books have long demonstrated the power and danger of law enforcement. Judge Dredd, first introduced in the *2000AD* comics magazine in 1977, took this to the next level. In the aftermath of the Atomic Wars, the North American entity of Mega-City One is controlled by the Justice Department. The Judges – and the titular Judge Dredd – are empowered as judge, jury, and executioner on the streets of Mega-City One and its colonies. The Judges are the law.

In *I Am The Law: How Judge Dredd Predicted Our Future*, Michael Molcher highlights how modern policing has become ominously reflective of the brutality portrayed in the *Judge Dredd* comics.¹ Blending stories from different periods of *Dredd* with theory and real-life events, Molcher argues that while this comic strip was first intended as an exaggerated satirical examination of British and North American society, it should be read as a warning. While

¹ Michael Molcher, *I Am The Law: How Judge Dredd Predicted Our Future* (Rebellion, 2023).

Mega-City One is in a future United States where New York once was, it was created by British comics writers and published by a British press, influenced by law and politics from both jurisdictions. From the Thatcherite approach to ‘law and order’ in the 1980s to the ‘stop and search’ powers and anti-protest laws contained in the Public Order Act 2023, Molcher documents the creeping autocratic role of our police force.

In recent years, there has been a heightened focus on police brutality in the US, particularly in relation to the disproportionately high murder of Black people at the hands of armed police officers. In 2020, the killing of George Floyd by a US police officer (among hundreds more Black people murdered by the police in 2020) sparked international Black Lives Matter protests and the largest protests in US history.² With many peaceful demonstrations branded as ‘riots’ by politicians and the media, police across numerous US states responded to protesters with disproportionate aggression, using “non-lethal” projectiles that caused serious injury to many – including at least eight people who were permanently blinded.³ In the UK the following year, 33-year-old Sarah Everard was abducted and murdered by a Metropolitan Police Officer, after accusing her of breaking COVID-19 restrictions.⁴ At a peaceful vigil in her memory, the Metropolitan Police responded by forcefully restraining and detaining women based on fears that the vigil was becoming an ‘anti-police’ protest.⁵ The narrative from the police in both countries was that the killers of George Floyd and Sarah Everard were individual ‘bad apples’ whose actions were not reflective of the institution as a whole.⁶

² Derrick Bryson Taylor, ‘George Floyd Protests: A Timeline’ (*New York Times*, 5 Nov 2021) <<https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd-protests-timeline.html>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

³ Meg Kelly, Joyce Sohyun Lee, and Jon Swaine, ‘Partially blinded by police’ (*Washington Post*, 14 Jul 2020) <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2020/07/14/george-floyd-protests-police-blinding/>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

⁴ Vikram Dodd and Haroon Siddique, ‘Sarah Everard murder: Wayne Couzens given whole-life sentence’ (*The Guardian*, 30 Sept 2021) <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/30/sarah-everard-murder-wayne-couzens-whole-life-sentence>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

⁵ Tristan Kirk, ‘Met officers justify breaking up Sarah Everard vigil as it became ‘anti-police protest’’ (*Evening Standard*, 7 Jun 2022) <<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/met-officers-sarah-everard-vigil-protest-arrests-prosecution-b1004602.html>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

⁶ Molcher (n1) p.66.

Molcher states that ‘[i]n the 1970’s, all cops were bastards.’⁷ Cops on screen and in fiction were being increasingly portrayed as violent and ruthless. The slogan “All Cops Are Bastards” (shorted to “ACAB”) has become internationally used to express anti-police sentiment and the idea that the police force as a whole, rather than those individual officers, is a tyrannical and irredeemable institution.⁸ Though the phrase can be traced back to 1940’s England,⁹ the focus of public awareness on the heavily militarised US police force risks obscuring the institutionalised harms caused by the police here in the UK. Molcher’s book importantly documents the increasing dangers of our government and police force – and why the future portrayed in the *Judge Dredd* comics ought to be taken seriously here as well as across the pond. The book exposes how both in the modern era of policing and the *Dredd* universe, the sentiment “All Cops Are Bastards” rings ever true.

Law, Order, and Control

I Am The Law starts out with a look at the moral panic over crime in 1970s Britain and the Conservative Party’s ‘law and order’ approach to demonstrations, riots, and street crime.¹⁰ Crime became increasingly associated with Black communities: between 1969 and 1970, the police raided the Mangrove Restaurant, opened by Black activist Frank Crichlow, on 12 occasions, culminating in a protest against police harassment that led to the trial of the ‘Mangrove Nine’ who had been charged with inciting a riot.¹¹ In 1976, the Notting Hill Carnival – the annual African-Caribbean festival taking place in London – was aggressively

⁷ *Ibid* p.37.

⁸ James Poulter, ‘How ‘ACAB’ Became the Universal Anti-Police Slogan’ (*Vice*, 8 Jun 2020) <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/akzv48/acab-all-cops-are-bastards-origin-story-protest>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

⁹ Colin Groundwater, ‘A brief history of ACAB’ (*GQ Magazine*, 11 Jun 2020) <<https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/politics/article/acab-meaning>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

¹⁰ Molcher (n1) Ch. 1.

¹¹ Pete Brook, ‘When cops raided a hip 1970s London café, Britain’s Black Power movement rose up’ (*Timeline*, 5 Feb 2018) <<https://timeline.com/cops-raided-a-1970s-london-cafe-britains-black-power-movement-ff855e7b23f0>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

policed, with officers stopping and searching young Black men by alleging pickpocketing.¹² When onlookers came to their defence, violence broke out and more police officers arrived with truncheons.¹³

The second issue of *2000AD*, which introduced Judge Dredd – ‘the toughest lawman of them all...’ – was published in 1977 in the context of this drive towards harsher law enforcement and criminal punishment.¹⁴ Molcher highlights that the first editor of *2000AD*, Pat Mills, viewed the comic as an avenue for exploring ‘discontent with the status quo and a deep desire to disrupt it’.¹⁵ The design for the Judges’ outfit – black suit, helmet, and ‘lunging shoulder eagle’ – was the ‘merging of the symbols of American power and European fascism.’¹⁶ Through this symbol for police authoritarianism, the *Dredd* comics could explore the workings of the ‘law and order’ approach to crime and the ‘myth’ of “policing by consent” which underlies the approach of the UK police.¹⁷

In an overcrowded Mega-City rife with crime, poverty, and unemployment, democracy cannot work; only the cloned Judges trained to be the perfect law enforcers can keep relative order. Within this system, it is not societal problems that need to be addressed, it is individuals – and individual criminals – that must be dealt with. Molcher explains that societal crises are stripped of complexity, and ‘all of society’s problems become reframed as problems of *crime*’.¹⁸ This is reminiscent for Molcher of Margaret Thatcher’s approach to crime which, in her view, was not political but about British moral values and civilisation.¹⁹ It was not the failures of the state that drove people to crime, it was individual moral failing – and those

¹² Molcher (n1) p.17-18; Jessica White, ‘Police, Press & Race in the Notting Hill Carnival ‘Disturbances’’ (*History Workshop*, 31 Aug 2020) <<https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/black-history/notting-hill-carnival-disturbances/>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

¹³ *Ibid*.

¹⁴ Molcher (n1) p.35; Pat Mills (Ed), *2000 A.D. Programme 2* (IPC Magazines, 1977).

¹⁵ Molcher (n1) p.45.

¹⁶ *Ibid* p.46.

¹⁷ *Ibid* p.52.

¹⁸ *Ibid* p.29-30.

¹⁹ Molcher (n1) p.32.

individuals needed to be punished.²⁰ While this approach was not new under Thatcher, her government strengthened the individualistic approach to crime which justified the retreat of the state in addressing social issues.

As Molcher explores, one of the most apt lessons demonstrated by the *Dredd* comics is that ‘law and order’ was not about ‘solving’ crime, it was – and remains – about control.²¹ Despite the swift calls to justice that the Judges bring down on their citizens, there remains endless and ubiquitous crime in Mega-City One. This notion of ‘law and order’ manifests ‘fantasies of control, of holding at bay, providing a false sense of protection and resolution’.²² Molcher demonstrates through an examination of police responses to societal problems in Mega-City One and in Britain that it is not the work of law enforcement to provide protection and resolution, but rather to provide discipline: ‘the forces of ‘security’ increasingly exist not to help turn down the heat but to screw the lid down ever tighter’.²³ Through a series of chapters covering the policing of borders, of citizenship, of race, of protest, of bodies, of discontent, Molcher demonstrates that policing is about protecting the state.

Dissent Will Not Be Tolerated

Illan rua Wall theorises public order as an affective sense of ‘lawful normality’ and ‘habitual obedience’ on which the state apparatus of sovereignty rests.²⁴ Disorder, disobedience, and unrest undermines the sense of stability that state power relies on. Wall argues that crowds are

²⁰ On the punitive policies of Thatcher and subsequent governments, see: David Faulkner, ‘The End of the Beginning of an Era’ Politics and Punishment Under Margaret Thatcher’s Government’ in Martin Wasik and Sotirios Santatzoglou (Eds), *The Management of Change in Criminal Justice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Stephen Farrall, Naomi Burke, and Colin Hay, ‘Revisiting Margaret Thatcher’s law and order agenda: The slow-burning fuse of punitiveness’ (2016) 11 *British Politics* 205-231.

²¹ Molcher (n1) p.94.

²² *Ibid* p.90.

²³ *Ibid* p.121.

²⁴ Illan Rua Wall, *Law and Disorder: Sovereignty, Protest, Atmosphere* (Routledge, 2020) p.1; p.65.

key drivers of the affective shift away from this normality, and as a result are constructed as violent or irrational.²⁵ Molcher observes that in ‘a city where any crowd is a threat, Dredd has never been a fan of protest.’²⁶ Law enforcement is necessary to uphold state sovereignty, or state control, over the people – so where crowds pose a threat to the state, the police step in as its protector.

In the UK, the statue of trans-Atlantic slave trader Edward Colston was pulled down and thrown into Bristol Harbour during the George Floyd protests.²⁷ Numerous politicians – including the then-Home Secretary Priti Patel, then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and leader of the Labour Party Keir Starmer – expressed outrage (or disapproval, for Starmer) at this act of ‘vandalism’ instead of following the democratic process to have the statue removed.²⁸ Four people were charged with criminal damage, although they were ultimately found not guilty.²⁹ This refusal to follow the ordinary legal process was branded by Priti Patel as an act of ‘public disorder’ – meaning an act of disobedience, posing a threat to the status quo and a threat to the sovereign state.³⁰

Molcher explores the 1987 *Dredd* strip ‘Revolution’ in which the biggest protest Mega-City One had ever seen was to take place, calling for reform and democracy.³¹ Judge Dredd is instructed to take ‘whatever action you deem necessary’ – and so proceeds the merciless beating of protesters, trumping up charges, making false accusations, and a series of other ‘dirty

²⁵ *Ibid* p.3.

²⁶ Molcher (n1) p.233.

²⁷ Mark Landler, ‘“Get Rid of Them”: A Statue Falls as Britain Confronts Its Racist History’ (*New York Times*, 8 Jun 2020) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/08/world/europe/edward-colston-statue-britain-racism.html>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

²⁸ Peter Walker, ‘Keir Starmer: pulling down Edward Colston statue was wrong’ (*The Guardian*, 8 Jun 2020) <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/08/keir-starmer-edward-colston-bristol-statue-wrong>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

²⁹ *Attorney General’s Reference on a Point of Law* [2022] EWCA Crim 1259.

³⁰ Sky News, ‘Priti Patel: Toppling Edward Colston statue ‘utterly disgraceful’ (7 Jun 2020) <<https://news.sky.com/video/priti-patel-toppling-edward-colston-statue-utterly-disgraceful-12002452>> accessed 4 Sep 2023.

³¹ Molcher (n1) Chs. 10-11; John Wagner and Alan Grant, ‘Revolution’ in *2000 A.D. Programmes 531-533* (Fleetway, 1987).

tricks'.³² In the chapter named after this comic strip, Molcher discusses how, up until this point, Dredd was always shown as a morally absolute character – existing simply to uphold the law, he was always in the right.³³ Surely this could not be in keeping with the Judges' ethos; yet the law can always be manoeuvred to justify the state's actions. What this comic strip reveals, Molcher argues, is that the state can create 'a legal framework that positions any action against the state as extremism and any act committed by the state is justified'.³⁴

Bringing this back to the real world, he explores the UK's new Public Order Act 2023 which permits injunctions on conduct causing 'nuisance or annoyance' and creates a series of anti-protest offences, including for causing 'serious disruption'.³⁵ In the context of the current scale of industrial action, movements calling for meaningful action on climate change, and discontent with the governing party, it is no wonder that the response has to been to ramp up anti-protest legislation as a means of control. Protest groups become framed as the enemy, and the police becomes a branch of protection for the state – not the people.

This idea of citizens as the 'enemy' is another issue covered in *I Am The Law*, in relation to the increasing militarisation of the police. For Judge Dredd, 'Mega-City One is a warzone. And its citizens are the enemy.'³⁶ Likewise, the US police force have become heavily armoured, and Molcher considers the use of SWAT teams – such as the one that fatally shot Breonna Taylor after bursting into her apartment – and riot police as examples of law enforcement as a paramilitary organisation.³⁷ The image of the military is also conjured in the discursive turn towards the 'war on crime', the 'war on drugs', or the 'war on terror'.³⁸ Civilians – and in particular criminals, drug-users, and terrorists (and those profiled as belonging to either

³² Molcher (n1) p.215; 232.

³³ *Ibid* p.234.

³⁴ *Ibid* p.248.

³⁵ Public Order Act 2023 s.19-20.

³⁶ Molcher (n1) p.208.

³⁷ *Ibid* p.202-203.

³⁸ *Ibid* p.200-202.

category) – are constructed as the enemy state, and the police as the army sent in to defeat them in battle.

The ‘Battle of Orgreave’ was a violent assault by the South Yorkshire Police (SYP) on picketers at the Orgreave Coking Works during the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike. 6,000 police officers equipped with riot gear, truncheons, and police dogs were sent to deal with the thousands of picketers at the Works, where they charged towards the picketers on horseback and delivered baton beatings.³⁹ One photograph from the confrontation shows an officer on a horse charging towards an unarmed woman, baton raised to strike her across the head.⁴⁰ Academics highlighted how the ‘police intended that Orgreave would be a “battle”’ with their preparation and approach aimed at escalating a confrontation, rather than attempting to diffuse it.⁴¹ Numerous miners at the event also described it as a ‘battlefield’.⁴² 95 picketers were charged with riot offences – but the trials collapsed when it became apparent that the SYP had made unlawful arrests and initiated malicious prosecutions based on fabricated evidence.⁴³ Reminiscent of the ‘Revolution’ comic strip, law enforcement was deployed here as a battle strategy intended to defeat the trade unionists at any cost. There was never any inquiry into the SYP.⁴⁴

Policing Disadvantage

³⁹ Dan Johnson, ‘Orgreave: The battle that’s not over’ (*BBC News*, 10 Oct 2016) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37562740>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

⁴⁰ Adrian Tompkins, ‘“A policeman took a full swipe at my head”: Lesley Boulton at the Battle of Orgreave, 1984’ (*The Guardian*, 16 Dec 2016) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/dec/16/battle-orgreave-lesley-boulton-photograph>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

⁴¹ Robert East, Helen Power, and Philip A. Thomas, ‘The Death of Mass Picketing’ (1985) 12(3) *Journal of Law and Society* 305, 309-310.

⁴² *Ibid* 309.

⁴³ Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign, ‘About’ <<https://otjc.org.uk/about/>> accessed 18 Jul 2023.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

The *Dredd* comics highlight how poverty, crime, and overzealous policing come hand-in-hand. Life in Mega-City One is precarious, with the combination of ‘sardine-tin housing’ and a lack of employment making disorder rife.⁴⁵ In one strip, rumours of one available job results in a mob at the job centre, which results in mass deaths.⁴⁶ The woman who is blamed for this is sent to the Iso-Cube (a prison cell used for solitary confinement) and deemed ‘lucky’ by the narrator that her struggles with unemployment were now over, unlike the millions of other citizens ‘unfortunate to be at liberty’.⁴⁷ Molcher takes this statement as reflective of the kind of ‘liberty’ under Thatcher that meant ‘only the freedom to be jobless, vulnerable, and bereft’.⁴⁸ As *I Am The Law* highlights, the writers of *Dredd* understood that ‘law and order’ was also part of a class war, and that law enforcement responses to crime were in lieu of the state support – housing, employment, education, healthcare, social care, childcare – that would actually make a difference. In a later chapter, Molcher applies Achille Mbembe’s concept of ‘necropolitics’ – that is, the systemic ‘subjugation of life to the power of death’⁴⁹ – to policing in Mega-City One and in the real world: ‘In a time when poverty, medical bills, precarious employment can reduce someone to ‘bare life’ and when a petty misdemeanour, a traffic stop, a mental health crisis, or simple lack of money can kill them, it is clear that the purpose of civilisation has become less about living and more about death.’⁵⁰

One of the *Dredd* stories that demonstrates this most aptly is ‘Breathing Space’.⁵¹ The Lunar One Colony, the largest human outpost on the moon, suffers from the same problems as Mega-City One: with a lack of investment comes poor housing and unemployment, and so the

⁴⁵ Molcher (n1) p.114.

⁴⁶ *Ibid* p.111; John Wagner and Alan Grant, ‘Sunday Night Fever’ in *2000 A.D. Programmes 416-418* (Fleetway, 1985).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ Molcher (n1) p.112.

⁴⁹ Molcher (n1) p.260; Achille Mbembe, *On The Postcolony* (University of California Press, 2001); Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019).

⁵⁰ Molcher (n1) p.267.

⁵¹ Rob Williams, ‘Breathing Space’ in *2000 A.D Programmes 1451-1459* (Rebellion, 2005).

Judges are outsourced to tackle crime here as well. Being in space has meant an opportunity for the greedy ‘air industrialists’ to privatise the Oxygen Board, and what happens when a citizen defaults on their oxygen bill? Their supply gets cut off. Oxygen can be restored upon full payment of the bill, but of course, the individual is already dead. While this might appear at first glance as a rather crude and extreme satirical outlook on the future of capitalism, the control of necessary public services by profit-motivated corporations can and does lead to death. In October 2003, two years prior to the publication of this story, a British couple were found dead in their homes after Ofgem cut off their gas supply.⁵² Instead of cutting off one’s supply, energy companies now send bailiffs to ensure the payment of bills – another form of law enforcement stepping into this necropolitical role. The outcome is ultimately the same; in December 2022, in the context of a cost-of-living crisis and soaring energy bills, there were an estimated 1,000+ excess deaths in England from living in cold, damp homes that they could not afford to heat.⁵³

While class issues feature at the forefront of the *Dredd* comic, Molcher importantly highlights in the penultimate chapter that race is largely absent from these stories. The racist association between Blackness and criminality means that Black people ‘engaged in ordinary everyday activity’ are disproportionately profiled as suspicious by the police.⁵⁴ While awareness of the frequency of Black people killed by the police in US has grown, the harm that policing causes to Black people in the UK remains relatively hidden – but it is there.⁵⁵ Moreover, the government’s racist, xenophobic migration policies and the use of immigration detention has meant that law enforcement also poses a particular threat to Black, Asian, and

⁵² Matthew Taylor, ‘Elderly couple die after gas cut off’ (*The Guardian*, 23 Dec 2003) <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2003/dec/23/weather.socialcare>> accessed 20 Jul 2023.

⁵³ End Fuel Poverty Coalition, ‘Excess Winter Deaths and fuel poverty’ <<https://www.endfuelpoverty.org.uk/about-fuel-poverty/excess-winter-deaths-and-fuel-poverty/>> accessed 20 Jul 2023.

⁵⁴ Molcher (n1) p.301.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* p.302; Adam Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing* (Manchester University Press, 2021) Ch.5.

other ethnic minority people without citizenship.⁵⁶ Even for people with citizenship, the case of Shamima Begum demonstrates that it can be taken away by the government – deemed a criminal, Begum lost the ‘right’ to her citizenship.⁵⁷ As of 2022, citizenship can be removed without notice where the Home Secretary considers it to be reasonably necessary, for example in the interests of national security.⁵⁸ In the strip ‘Punks Rule!’, Judge Dredd states that ‘citizenship is a privilege – not a right!’⁵⁹ Perhaps the most chilling comparison that Molcher identifies is that the Home Office used this exact phrasing, without irony, in November 2021.⁶⁰

Another issue which is also absent from the *Judge Dredd* comics, and which Molcher does not address, is how gender is relevant to police violence. Following the rape and murder of Sarah Everard, it emerged that the perpetrator, Metropolitan Police officer Wayne Couzens, had a history of committing sexual violence.⁶¹ Police officers are often dismissive of women’s reports of sexual violence and domestic abuse, particularly when the accusation is made against a fellow police officer.⁶² Couzens had been accused of indecent exposure on multiple occasions, and none of these incidents had been properly investigated.⁶³ The Everard case sparked a public discussion on women’s safety, leading to investigations by external organisations showing that of the over 1,300 police officers accused of domestic violence since 2018, just 36 had been dismissed from their jobs.⁶⁴ Of the 169 Metropolitan police officers

⁵⁶ Maya Goodfellow, *Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats* (Verso, 2020).

⁵⁷ Molcher (n1) p.95-96.

⁵⁸ Nationality and Borders Act 2022 s.10.

⁵⁹ John Wagner, ‘Punks Rule!’ in *2000 A.D. Programme 110* (Fleetway, 1979).

⁶⁰ Molcher (n1) p.97.

⁶¹ Leah Sinclair, ‘Wayne Couzens nicknamed ‘The Rapist’ three years before he was hired by Met’ (*Evening Standard*, 10 Jul 2021) <<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/wayne-couzens-nickname-met-police-sarah-everard-b945119.html>> accessed 4 Sep 2023.

⁶² HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the College of Policing, and the Independent Office for Police Conduct, *Police perpetrated domestic abuse: Report on the Centre for Women’s Justice super-complaint* (30 Jun 2022) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-super-complaints-force-response-to-police-perpetrated-domestic-abuse>> accessed 4 Sep 2023.

⁶³ *BBC News*, ‘Wayne Couzens: Ex-Met PC in flashing case guilty of gross misconduct’ (23 May 2023) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-65671361>> accessed 4 Sep 2023.

⁶⁴ Sarah Hague, ‘Police Officers Accused of Abuse Avoid Convictions and Keep Their Jobs’ (Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 17 Mar 2022) <<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2022-03-17/police-officers-accused-of-abuse-avoid-convictions-and-keep-their-jobs>> accessed 4 Sep 2023.

accused of sexual offences between 2018-2021, just 11 were suspended.⁶⁵ In 2022, 19 police officers were found to be sharing racist and misogynistic messages in a Whatsapp group, including making rape threats towards a woman officer and domestic abuse threats towards their own partners.⁶⁶ In the US, no government entity collects data on police officers accused of domestic or sexual violence, but studies suggest that a similar pattern to the UK, with officers concealing instances of violence, is likely.⁶⁷ Any analysis of dystopian policing cultures is incomplete without addressing the role of the police in perpetuating and concealing violence against women. It is unfortunate, particularly given the history of violence against women being overlooked, that this issue is missing from *I Am The Law*.

Conclusion: Policing Dystopia

The final chapter of *I Am The Law* discusses the ‘Origins’ story, published between 2006 and 2007 to answer a number of questions about the backstory of the Judges and Mega-City One.⁶⁸ It is a story of the end of democracy, of ‘the police beleaguered, the courts corrupted, the streets unsafe, and gang warfare and civil unrest consuming the rapidly urbanising seaboard’.⁶⁹ And so the Judges step in – but this regime ‘wasn’t meant to last forever’.⁷⁰ In Molcher’s view, this sentence turns *Dredd* into a ‘horror story’.⁷¹ The turn to authoritarian policing was intended as a temporary measure, but once it set in, it was impossible to overcome. What Molcher (and the

⁶⁵ Metropolitan Police, ‘Police staff accused of sexual assault/harassment’ (Jul 2021) <<https://www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/disclosure-2021/july-2021/police-staff-accused-of-sexual-assault-harassment/>> accessed 4 Sep 2023.

⁶⁶ Vikram Dodd, ‘Met officers joked about raping women, police watchdog reveals’ (*The Guardian*, 1 Feb 2022) <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/01/met-officers-joked-raping-women-police-watchdog-racist>> accessed 4 Sep 2023.

⁶⁷ See Philip Matthew Stinson and John Liederbach, ‘Fox in the Henhouse: A Study of Police Officers Arrested for Crimes Associated With Domestic and/or Family Violence’ (2013) 24(5) *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 601.

⁶⁸ John Wagner, ‘Origins’ in *2000 A.D. Programmes 1505-1519, 1529-1535* (Rebellion, 2006-2007).

⁶⁹ Molcher (n1) p.324.

⁷⁰ Molcher (n1) p.339; Wagner (n68).

⁷¹ Molcher (n1) p.339.

Dredd comics) demonstrate is that there is a sliding scale from us in the UK (and certainly in the US) to Mega-City One – that we might not have dystopian policing to the same extent, but we have dystopian policing nonetheless. As our current government attempts to erode human rights and chip away at public services more and more (in line with the individual responsibility approach propagated under Thatcher), the dystopia creeps closer and – as ‘Origins’ suggests – becomes harder for us to escape it.

I Am The Law exposes through the medium of Judge Dredd that police power is about anything but justice. As a way of visualising what the logical conclusion of modern policing might be, the *Dredd* comics are key for exploring abolitionist arguments and showcasing why change is expediently necessary. For long-standing readers of Judge Dredd and those new to the comic strip, this book is a good starting point for considering the dystopian past, present, and future of policing. It is accessible but carries depth in both political material and comics knowledge and serves as a thorough introduction to the police abolitionist cause. While it would have benefited from an exploration of police violence against women, the book nonetheless serves as a call for reflection and a call to action. In the conclusion, Molcher asks: ‘What are you willing to allow in order to feel ‘safe’? Whose safety are you willing to sacrifice? How many police, how many laws, how many restrictions will finally fulfil the ‘promise’ of policing that it can ‘win’ the war on crime?’⁷²

⁷² Molcher (n1) p.343.