



Scarlett Johansson refused to give in to BDS pressure. (Mario Anzuoni/Reuters)

# Hollywood insider puts BDS on trial

Lana Melman's book 'Artists Under Fire' is a call to action against censorship and the cancel culture campaign targeting people expressing support of Israel

By EVE GLOVER

Entertainment industry veteran and author Lana Melman fights antisemitism in Hollywood out of her love for Judaism and Israel.

In 2011, Melman found herself in the center of a storm when the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement began picking up speed in Hollywood. BDS activists were boycotting, threatening and harassing artists with any Israel-related associations.

Melman became premier director of Creative Community for Peace (CCFP), a pro-Israel nonprofit organization that works to combat antisemitism in the entertainment industry. She counseled artists who were unprepared for this type of harassment and helped them to understand that these attacks were not going to have long-term effects on their careers.

She explains, "BDS tosses out threats to artists, like, 'We're dragging your name through the mud, we're calling you a racist for going to Israel, and now no one's going to want to buy your music, and your career is going to be over.'"

She says artists were "shocked to be attacked and victimized by a cancel culture campaign. They didn't have any clue that their name and brand were going to be used to spread disinformation about Jews in Israel."

Melman began her career as an entertainment attorney for Columbia Pictures Television because she always wanted to be part of that creative world. She earned her law degree from UCLA and quickly transitioned to the artistic side at CBS, Warner Bros. and Paramount. She was also a writer for the hit '80s TV show *Beverly Hills 90210* and executive producer of TV movies.

Melman grew up in Los Angeles at a time when Jewish people were not welcome in certain neighborhoods, country clubs or schools. Melman notes that she was raised "in a secular but very Jewish home. There was always this very strong feeling of our Judaism, and it was combined with this feeling that we were different and loved each other but not always accepted by the outside world."

Reminders of past horrors in Jewish history loomed in the background. Her grandmother spoke in a hushed voice about the



Author Lana Melman (Molly Pan)

violent pogroms in her Russian homeland, and she caught glimpses of numbers tattooed on the arms of her friends' parents. Melman's father, who fought in World War II, described how, in LA in the 1930s, he saw signs hung in store windows that starkly read: "No dogs, no Jews, no Negroes allowed."

When Melman was nine, her mother told her about the Holocaust. "It was at that moment I realized that this feeling of 'tribe' went way beyond my extended family and that I have a common destiny with Jews everywhere," she said. "The wonderful thing was that when my mother explained the Holocaust to me, she ended it with the miracle of Israel."

After Melman married and had two sons, the younger one started asking her about God and religion when he was four. "I didn't know how to answer because I had not received any religious training to even have as a basis. As a result, I decided to go to Torah study at my local synagogue," she recalls. "My expectation was that it would be a 10-week class, but it turned into 15 years."

She described reading the Torah as "another layer that helped cement my connection to our ancient homeland." She was so inspired that she celebrated her bat mitzvah around the same time as her sons. "The

sweet part about it is that I was in my 40s," she says.

In 2015, Melman broadened her fight against BDS by founding Liberate Art, an organization that connects entertainers from all over the world with Israel. They arranged for Ziggy Marley to join forces with the Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael-Jewish National Fund in support of its clean water initiative, and produced the first anti-BDS artists' panel.

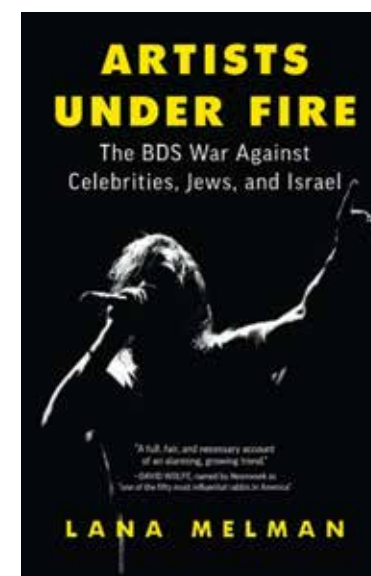
Through speaking engagements, she "sounds the alarm about how poisonous the cultural boycott campaign is and how it's forcing artists to bow to a political weapon." She states, "I needed to present this case to the world."

Melman's new book, *Artists Under Fire: The BDS War Against Celebrities, Jews and Israel*, is a call to action against censorship and deprivation of artistry. It shows how dangerous propaganda gains traction, and offers solutions on how to combat it. Melman expresses compassion, rather than judgment, toward young artists who caved to BDS threats because they were afraid and felt intimidated. The book also provides extensive history about Israel, presenting in-depth facts that prove this land is the Jewish homeland.

In *Artists Under Fire*, Melman details how she helped singer-songwriter Alicia Keys



Lana Melman participates in an anti-BDS celebrity panel with Alan Parsons (right) and Guy Erez of the Alan Parsons Project, 2015. (Seth Joel)



The cover of Melman's anti-BDS book

extended her trip by five days and later performed in New York with Israeli and Palestinian musicians.

Other artists, such as actress and singer Demi Lovato, capitulated to BDS. In 2019, she took a trip to Israel with her mother, where she described having a spiritual experience seeing the places she had read about in the Bible, and being baptized in the Jordan River. It was a healing experience for her after battling addiction and nearly dying from a drug overdose the year before.

On an Instagram post that has since been taken down, Lovato wrote: "There is something absolutely magical about Israel. I've never felt such a sense of spirituality or connection to God... This trip has been so important for my well-being, my heart and my soul. I'm grateful for the memories made and the opportunity to be able to fill the God-sized hole in my heart."

Lovato's words were met with a barrage of hate from BDS supporters, who bullied her into apologizing. BDS also accused her of "being recruited to whitewash Israel's far-Right apartheid regime" because her trip was free, although celebrities accept free trips all over the world and post about them.

*Artists Under Fire* describes how some BDS proponents take harassment and intimidation a step further, to the point of threatening artists' lives. When former Beatle Sir Paul McCartney announced he would be performing in Tel Aviv to celebrate Israel's 60th anniversary, he was warned by Islamic activist Omar Bakri Muhammad that if he went through with it, "sacrifice operatives will be waiting for him." McCartney said he does what he thinks and performed in Israel anyway.

Irish singer-songwriter Sarah McLernan received "sinister threats" after she sang in the Eurovision song contest in Israel. Melman describes the campaign against her as "genuine intimidation." Some of the foreboding messages said, "You have to be careful"; "Watch where you go"; "You never know where I'll be"; "Be careful who you're with."

Prior to having a show in Israel, Angela Gossow, lead singer for the Swedish band Arch Enemy, posted a message on the BDS Facebook page that warned: "If the con-

stant threats, bullying, and slander of Arch Enemy via email and online does not stop immediately, we will publish some of the threats we have received from your supporters, where they claim they will come to some of our shows and threaten to attack us, both verbally and physically."

Melman implores people to question whether the tactics employed by BDS supporters are reflective of a movement that claims to be about justice and human rights. "Do you want to support an organization that fosters these kinds of threats? Do you find this movement or BDS's messaging to be moral and ethical? Look at what happens to these artists!"

Melman explains how antisemitic tropes that go as far back as medieval times, like accusing Jews of blood libel, are at the core of BDS campaigns, and that their own messaging proves they are antisemitic. "Repeating antisemitic tropes is part of BDS propaganda. When you say 'stolen land,' you are accusing Jews of being greedy thieves, and that's a classic antisemitic trope that stirs up worldwide Jew-hatred."

Melman's historical knowledge about Israel from the Torah empowers her to combat the lies. "Jews have been saying this is our land for over 3,000 years, and we know that because of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are carbon-dated to be [from] between 100 and 300 BCE. That's the text that came from the Old Testament. It is not something we just made up; the scrolls predate Muhammad. They predate Islam."

She adds, "The more scientific research you do through archaeology, which no one disputes, just proves that some of the historical events mentioned in the Torah are being verified. There's documentation that King David lived at around 1000 BCE."

She notes that Jews have been reading from the same book, in the same language, and in the same place for thousands of years.

The BDS movement claims to fight against Israel's "oppression" of Palestinians," but Melman notes that their own activists "will frequently sabotage attempts to help the Palestinian people."

"I have never seen any call from BDS for peace or prosperity or any way forward," she adds.

A few weeks ago, indie rock band Big Thief, which has one Israeli member and has played in Israel before, canceled two shows in Tel Aviv after BDS launched a campaign against them. "They had been there before and anticipated there would be pressure to cancel," Melman relates, "so upfront they said they were going to take their proceeds from the concert in Tel Aviv and donate it to a Palestinian nonprofit, and BDS said, 'No.'"

Similarly, in 2017, British actor and comedian Eddie Izzard was banned from running in a Palestinian marathon that was to support freedom for Palestinians because she had performed in Israel the day before. Izzard's appearance would have brought great attention to the cause, but, Melman states, "They sabotaged that. To supporters of the cultural boycott, it is not enough for artists to care about the Palestinian people; they must unequivocally renounce Israel."

In 2014, BDS went into attack mode when actress Scarlett Johansson became global brand ambassador for the Israeli soda machine manufacturer SodaStream. She starred in a Super Bowl commercial for the company, and a highly publicized, malicious campaign against her ensued.

BDS activists accused Johansson of crimes against humanity because of her ties to the Israeli company. A photoshopped image of Johansson circulated online with the headline "Scarlett Letter A for Apartheid." It showed Johansson with a glaring red "A" in the middle of her forehead. Surrounding her were bubbles against a red background that could represent blood.

Johansson defended SodaStream, whose plant in Judea (the West Bank) employed 1,100 Palestinians and Israelis, by saying they were "building a bridge to peace between Israel and Palestine, supporting neighbors working alongside each other, receiving equal pay, equal benefits and equal rights."

She also stepped down from her role as global ambassador of the international nonprofit Oxfam - a position she held for eight years - citing differing views about BDS as the reason.

Melman organized a "gratitude campaign" for Johansson, something she strongly encourages people to get involved with when artists stand up for Israel. "People supporting artists who are against the boycott and speak the truth about Israel are too quiet. We need to thank these artists when they do not fall prey to BDS harassment and intimidation. The more support they get from the audience, the more they'll be comfortable about performing in Israel."

She suggests people "write letters to the editors, op-eds, there's social media - I provide access for people who get my newsletter. We need to be active; a momentum happens."

Melman recalls that when she was writing her book, she "built a case and put BDS on trial." It's clear that BDS supporters don't want artists under any circumstances to visit Israel because, Melman points out, "then they would see that it's vibrant and diverse. That's evidence of the fact that they're lying because Zionists aren't afraid of what you'll see when you go there." ■

Melman's book, *Artists Under Fire: The BDS War Against Celebrities, Jews and Israel*, is available at [www.liberateart.net/artistsunderfire](http://www.liberateart.net/artistsunderfire)