



Unruly: The Highs and Lows of Becoming a Man

Ja Rule , Jeff Atkins

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Ja Rule, actor, singer, songwriter, and one of the most multi-dimensional rap artists of his time, tells his compelling story—from his youth to his rise to international fame to his transformative two years in Federal prison—and reveals the man beneath the legend.

Unruly is two stories that offer one complete picture of a man and his world: the angry, fatherless rapper, Ja Rule who was “raised by the streets”; and Jeffrey Atkins, the insightful, reflective father and loyal husband who learned the hard way how to be a good man.

Filled with never-before-revealed anecdotes and sixteen pages of black-and-white photos, *Unruly* shows the determination that it takes to become a man in today’s society. Ja Rule considers the lack of role models for many young black men today—a void that leads to bad choices and the wrong paths. Recalling his youth, he illuminates the seductive pull of the streets and the drug dealers who were his earliest role models.

Jeffrey Atkins offers practical wisdom—reflection, growth and hope learned first-hand as an inmate, father, husband, and community role model. He speaks fondly of men who inspired *Unruly*—the inmates he met in prison whose misguided ideas of masculinity landed them behind bars—and Louis Farrakhan who mediated the televised encounter with Ja Rule’s adversary, 50 Cent.

Unruly is a compelling, personal look at the duality and conflicts that arise in the African-American male psyche from a man who has enjoyed breathtaking fame and suffered heartbreak misfortune.

Unruly: The Highs and Lows of Becoming a Man Details

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From Reader Review Unruly: The Highs and Lows of Becoming a Man for online ebook

Darren Dixon says

A quick easy read , not as in-depth as other musicians books I have read which knocks off stars overall. Still , again a decent read if you are or were a fan of JA.

Andre says

A very pedestrian autobiography that is not very well structured but does manage to be somewhat entertaining and candid. Ja Rule's story is shared in a linear fashion from childhood to rap star to inmate, and up to the present. There isn't much depth given to any particular time period or events therein. I don't think it even works as a cautionary tale for young men, because the pain of hustling doesn't seem all that impactful and some may see it as part of the necessary sacrifice if a recording career can be built from the ruins.

So, if you're not a fan of hip hop in general and/or Ja Rule in particular you won't find much value in this autobiography. On the other hand, adherents of rap music and culture will revel in the tidbits and personalities that helped Ja Rule achieve a measure of success. Buried deep in this book is an interesting life, it's a shame more of that life wasn't flushed out in what seems like a rush job.

David Dacosta says

I've never owned a Ja Rule album. His gravelly voice sing-song style always irritated my ears. He and a slew of other late-90s rappers were essentially clones of Tupac - bare chested tattooed thugs whose careers would have taken a much different path had Shakur survived that hail of bullets on that tragic night in 1996. So why read a Ja Rule memoir? Call it curiosity. That and the fact that I spent the first seven years of my journalism career interviewing the who's who of Hip Hop music during the 1990s.

Like far too many black youth growing up in America's inner cities, Ja touches on the hardships of being raised by a single mother, and mourning the loss of an absentee father. These details, however valid to his evolution as a person, unfortunately come off as generic, and had me asking the question: when will we get to the interesting stuff? Namely the music biz aspect of his life. His exploits in criminality as a teen also seemed rather textbook.

By the time Ja Rule's debut album, *Venni Vetti Vecci*, was released in 1999, Hip Hop had merged with the mainstream. Much of what his record label, Def Jam, was selling at that time was disposable and image driven. As a purist, I regarded this output as more, Hip Pop, than anything else. The days of superior rhyme skills and innovative production were being replaced by a fixation with Billboard chart positions and Soundscan figures (retail sales tracking).

The family man narrative is perhaps the most meaningful aspect of this memoir. The details of Ja Rule's rise to rap prominence felt disjointed due to an unorthodox structure. And the inclusion of his feud with fellow rapper 50 Cent, along with info regarding notorious industry plaything, Karrine Steffans, reflected poorly on

him. Ultimately, I got what I deserved by reading a memoir by a rapper I've never had the slightest respect for musically, mediocrity.

Erin says

Pretty mediocre, but the parts about his interactions with other rap royalty like DMX, 50 cent, and Jay Z was fascinating.

Lynetta says

INQUIRING MINDS

I have listened to the rough and smooth verses spoken by JaRule at the height of his music career- the most memorable-Always on my mind. His voice commands attention and the message he sends in Unruly: The Highs and Lows of Becoming a Man merits attention as well. Like his rap, the message he shares is inviting and unpolished. He delivers the message in straight shooter fashion where he takes no prisoners. He speaks with authority and there is no doubting that he speaks truth. To often inquiring minds want to know but fail to seek answers from the right source. I am of the inquiring minds and I am interested in the unseen/unheard influences that factor into the decisions made by black males . I postulate that the why's of black men are much the same as those of other men irregardless of color and/ or ethnicity. Unruly cultivates understanding where there is ignorance and eloquently lays the foundation of all our existences. Read and decide for yourself whether or not you are your brother's keeper. This is much more than story telling it is a lesson not soon forgotten. I highly recommend it to young and old as it's message is one we all can learn from.

Kimberly Hicks says

Well, what hasn't Jeffrey Atkins a/k/a Ja Rule, been through? I'm sure there is much he left out of his memoir, but it was important for him to speak about what matters--his reputation as a rapper, his humanity, being a father and loving husband.

It was nice to see Rule grow as he told his story, which is very familiar for many of us having grown up poor, in the projects and the mean streets of the ghetto. From having an absent father, to a mother who worked hard to put food on the table and keep her son close to her heart. His early beginnings sort of stunned me because I couldn't imagine him having such a religious background. I suppose it felt weird reading his upbringing based on the news reports we all heard or read.

He came clean, as any celebrity can, about his beef with 50 Cent and the take down of his record label Murder, Inc. His words were poetic in some ways and mesmerizing as he told of his drug dealing days and coming so close to death a few times. Thank God behind every good man is a greater woman, and his wife who certainly is his ride or die, stood firm beside her man in all that he did. I'm sure it wasn't easy having a famous husband who liked the ladies.

Ja is back better than ever and living his life. He's been out of prison for about a year now, and it is my hope for him that he never ever sees the inside of a real jail cell again. It's one thing to portray an inmate on the silver screen, but to actually live it is an entirely different matter. This is a pretty decent read.

My only criticisms would be there weren't any pictures in the Kindle version, which is a bummer for a fan, and his story jumped around a great deal to the point it was hard to concentrate on one thing or another. As soon as he got me interested in one area, he would jump to something else. However, it doesn't take much away from his story and it's a good read. I say well done. I wish you the best Ja!

Courtney Smith Atkins says

This is an odd psychological journey through a skewed mind influenced by drugs and violence. I could not resist reading it and really wanted to send it out as a jokey gift. But other people (that I care about!) might actually then read it which would be a shame. Why did I like it then? There were laugh out loud lines within the chapters and just things that truly caught me off guard (people think like that!!!!). It was a cross between laughing and shaking my head.

Karena says

I liked the book, it wasn't too long and it was an interesting read. I did have the opinion that Ja Rule was just another dumb rapper who got caught up in that game lifestyle and had to serve time in jail. But his book showed much differently, I read about his struggles growing up in a broken home, dropping out of high school, selling drugs, meeting his future wife in high school. It took some time for him to enter the music industry with some few setbacks but once he did he shot off like a rocket. He won all sorts of awards and recognition, but as with too much fame and no guidelines on how to handle oneself out in Hollywood comes the downfall. The lawsuits came, the gun charges, and he had to do his time in jail, I don't know how his family endured such a hard time. But, he was a committed father, as far as being a husband went that was debatable because he did mention Karrine Steffans, Ms Supahead and how she wrote the encounter in her book but he was careful in not admitting to ever having sex with her, he instead made it seem like he just passed her around to his friends. The 50 Cent beef was very interesting and it cleared up some questions I had and also had me looking at 50 differently than before. So, the book was enjoyable, he got caught up in drama and had to do his time, I never got the woe is me sing from him in the book. He was truthful about every offense he made against the law he was accountable for his actions. I appreciated his sense of community and the way he talked about the plight of Black people and our complex history and interlaced it like a backdrop to his book, he didn't use it as a crutch but I got the sense that he knew history wise where he came from and how he tried to spread that knowledge with his fellow inmates. I love reading auto-biographies by rappers and how they got to the rap industry. I think it's because I grew up in the beginning stages of hip-hop when it was at its most creative level. Now on to read Common's One day it will all make sense.....

Aja says

Holy misogyny Batman! Sometimes I read things and go into knowing that I'm probably not going to like the book but hoping to learn something new. Gain some new insight into a world I don't know much about

perhaps. This book definitely achieved that goal. I learned SO MUCH about the hip hop world that existed 1990 and on. I learned about who did what, who knew who and how the most infamous feuds started. And let me tell you, the feuds make my head hurt. Grown men bickering over what? Because someone said you sung on a record? That is the dumbest shit I've ever heard. My brain literally hurt over the nonsense with him and 50 Cent. I always suspected it was dumb but I never knew exactly HOW stupid we were talking. Ja Rule seems to place very little value on women and the people he hurts. He kind of has the makings of a sociopath. In his book, there seemed to be very little remorse for the actions which landed him in jail and more self pity because he was missing out on life. He manages to explain events which nearly killed people with the same blase tone one would use when verbally announcing that they were off to the grocery store. A man takes a drink out of your hand? Beat his ass. It will only cost you \$80k. Someone steals from you? Buy a baseball bat and beat him to near death. Biblical law, man. Get caught up in the book *Confessions of a Video Vixen*? Don't focus on the fact that you couldn't keep your dick in your pants, focus on the fact that she snitched on you. Nothing is of course, ever your fault, right? Barf.

Andrew Hicks says

The big difference between Ja Rule's memoir and other celebrity memoirs I've read lately - he rushes straight through his account of the prime years of his career. The middle third of *Unruly* deals with Rule's rapid ascent to stardom, his few years spent on the A-list of hip-hop and pop music and his legendary beef with 50 Cent and Eminem's camp. People ended up dead because of the rivalry, he tells us. 50 got stabbed by one of Rule's entourage. But Ja doesn't explain the feud in a way that makes much sense.

The narrative in *Unruly*, particularly the fame-and-fortune section, is frequently unclear and murky. It takes that "of course, you already know..." approach, but I *don't* already know. I picked up your book because I wanted to know more. We're roughly the same age. I remember what *I* was doing when your career arced up from nowhere to the top. I wanna know what *you* were doing, what life was like for *you* from 1998-2003. I want more than 70 pages about those five years. And I think I'm gonna go read 50 Cent's memoir next, honestly.

But guess what. Something I liked about Ja Rule's memoir, compared to other celebrity memoirs I've read lately - he spends probably the first 40 percent of his book talking about his childhood, adolescence and teenage years. This was a dude whose father left when he was very young, whose single mom struggled to make ends meet, who became aware of a talent that set him apart, who didn't feel whole and complete as a person until he started drinking and getting high. All things I could relate to.

And this was a dude who dropped out of school early, when he realized he could make a grand a week selling crack on the street corners of Queens. Everybody sold crack in the evenings and at night, but people wanted to buy crack during the day, too. There was an AM crack market no one was catering to, and teenage Ja Rule figured this out and made him some good crack money. This is stuff I can't relate to but that nonetheless fascinates me.

So Ja, in the book, starts to realize he's a good rapper, starts to write down his shit and practice his freestyles, and from there he's simply in the right place at the right time. Irv Gotti, who founds the Murder Inc. record label under Def Jam, is one of Ja's buddies. They're hired into Def Jam together during the same meeting. Meanwhile, Jay-Z and DMX are on the cusp of superstardom, and they all appear together on Mic Geronimo's classic track "Time to Build." Ja's big break is his verse on "Can I Get a..." from the first *Rush Hour* soundtrack, a Jay-Z song he wrote the hook for.

The stage is set for his first solo album, which drops in 1999 and has a mega-hit in "Holla Holla." Somewhere along the line, while working on the followup album, Ja strikes gold when he realizes if you get an R+B chick to sing every chorus, and you give her a verse and interact with her in the song, you have a shot at the #1 spot on Billboard's Hot 100. Artists who aren't otherwise affiliated with hip-hop will call and ask you to write songs for them. The book explores none of the creative process or gossip stories behind this; it's presented as an after-the-fact "of course you know that..." aside.

The book moves chronologically, but between each chapter is an italicized "present-tense" interlude written from prison, as Ja serves 26 months for a weapons charge and tax evasion. The grammar is loose and unfiltered through these sections, with frequent LOLs and symbols replacing words (e.g. "&" for "and"), and his wife and each of his kids get an individualized shout-out. These portions are less structured and not essential to the story, but they help drive home the point that this dude - who was abandoned by his father, who was abandoned by his father - has regrets and is determined to be integral to the life of the family he created.

Initially, the italicized interludes are the only parts of the book with rampant typos and grammatical errors, but as the narrative creeps on, the typos invade the main text too. This book, while it did entertain me and grab me as a reader, raises more questions than it answers. A great editor would've read the early drafts of *Unruly*, asked some of these same questions for Ja Rule to answer in future drafts. All I had was Wikipedia, which gave me more clear and concise answers about the events in Ja Rule's career and legal troubles than Ja Rule's book did.

But there was one fact that was wrong on Wikipedia's page for Ja Rule - it said Rule's sister died at age 5 from breathing complications, when actually his sister died in the womb and was stillborn when Rule was 5. I changed that info on the Wikipedia page. It was my first time editing Wikipedia, which allowed me to cross one more item off my "White and Nerdy" bucket list. I got to do that at the end of *Unruly*, and Ja Rule got to be released from prison and return to his family and career. Happy endings all around.

PS. ...oh, except for this little dead-on detail, captured in Aja's review of *Unruly*: "There seemed to be very little remorse for the actions which landed [Ja Rule] in jail and more self pity because he was missing out on life. He manages to explain events which nearly killed people with the same blasé tone one would use when verbally announcing that they were off to the grocery store. A man takes a drink out of your hand? Beat his ass. It will only cost you \$80k. Someone steals from you? Buy a baseball bat and beat him to near death. Biblical law, man. Get caught up in the book *Confessions of a Video Vixen*? Don't focus on the fact that you couldn't keep your dick in your pants, focus on the fact that she snitched on you. Nothing is of course, ever your fault, right? Barf."

Travis Bean says

Ja Rule is a crazy person. And I love him for it.

Some key quotes from the book:

"You have to have something to brag about when shit is all fucked-up."

"It was like how I'd wanted sex to be: butt-naked bodies, heavy breathing and sweaty skin rubbing up against everywhere."

"I used to think, fuck history and social studies. But I was wrong. If we don't know our history, we are lost."

"If the crackhead would sway to the left, I would hit him from the right with a left. The fiends couldn't even see our punches coming and then with one light tap, BAM! they were out cold laying on the ground, with their head right next to my fresh new sneakers. So, motherfuckas started calling me Left. I kinda liked that shit, too."

"I'm like Fred Astaire to these niggas. Ha Ha."

"I was mad as a motherfucker that they put me in the dirtiest fuckin cell they could find. So much for being a superstar. LOL."

"I jumped up, brushed my teeth wit some shit that was supposed to be toothpaste, took a bird bath at the sink and hurried the fuck outta there hoping the next stop was at least a real jail and not no county bullshit."

"Moms was noticing other strange things like opening up our mailbox and finding small little baggies filled with crack rocks."

"I knew they were going to shoot me in the back of the head, which is a punk way of murdering a homie, if I must say so myself."

"They were all letting their jobs, their homes, their children and their mates slip through their fingers without a second thought. All because of drugs. I ain't gonna lie, that shit was depressing as fuck."

"We called ourselves "the Four Horsemen," even though there were only three of us. That shit made us laugh our asses off."

"We had used condoms for the first straight year. And then we don't know what happened. I think I was the one who suggested that we use the "withdrawal method." Id heard from someone that it worked. Or maybe, I'd heard that it didn't work."

"I would always love the baby and Aisha, forever, but I may not be there to change diapers and shit. I would be out on the road, in stage, signing autographs--where I belonged."

"I've reached the last spot on my Jail Tour. LOL."

"In essence, taking off my shirt was the best thing I ever could have done."

"This is how the industry creates its egomaniacs. It's how Kanye West can say that he's God. I get it. I understand the feeling. But people are not comfortable with a Black man calling himself God. But, we're taught in the Bible that we're made in His image. And how we should live our lives in accordance with God's words. So, what's wrong with Kanye saying that. Aren't we all God's children. Our gifts are a blessing, but it's up to us to use them productively, and not take them for granted or even abuse them."

"The interesting thing is that the first week it came out, it sold 187,000 copies, and 187 is the LA police code for murder. Me and Irv Gotti thought it was a sign from God that our time had come. It's murder had finally become a reality."

"I came, I saw, I conquered. Hell yeah."

"Ja Rule and Murder Inc. were slaying the radio. Our joints added the instrumentation of R&B and the sensuality of female vocals and put them over dope tracks. The combination made every hot joint even hotter."

"My man Merc, he had broken his foot. I took his crutch to use as a weapon."

"When I feel the tightening of my skin and the quickening pace of my heartbeat, it always leads to severe bodily harm for others."

"I had always lived by the principle of an eye for an eye. If you steal something you should get your hands cut off. This is how life should be. If you rape someone you should be castrated. I feel if these things were implemented into society, we wouldn't have all of the troubles that we have with crime."

"I haven't drank, smoked or fucked in almost 2 years. I might be able to walk on water right now, LOL."

"During rec time, I hit the weights. I gained about thirty pounds. People thought I was lifting Toyotas in that bitch."

Taylor says

I've never been much of a fan of memoir/biography style reading; they move slow, clamber for interesting material, and end in a less-than-extravagant fashion. That being said, this was one of the better memoirs I have ever read. The "story line" is set up fairly well (minus my distaste for the occasion 'prison journal' excerpts) and the language was awesome. I can see where the language may be a problem; much of it is not written in SAE and the pages are riddled with swear words. For YA, however, edgy is interesting, and this book is edgy.

Although I enjoyed the book, I do not by any means think it is for everyone. Touchy subjects like violence, drug dealing, and lewd sexual activity could easily turn off many readers from this book, or make it inappropriate for lower grade levels. I don't mean to delve too deeply into it, but there were some parts that just hit the wrong chord with my inner feminist as well; inequality, moderately misogynist undertones, a lack of respect for others, all of these things contributed to the distaste I had for the book, but not enough to make me hate the book completely. I just wouldn't have it in my list of highly recommended books.

Overall, it was an interesting read. I gained some knowledge about a rapper I've heard all of my life and read a first-hand account of life on the streets of the hood. I've never had to experience this, and the insight was highly interesting despite some of the negative aspects of the book. 3.5/5

Andrea Ball says

I absolutely love this book. It allows you to see the man behind the music. Ja Rule opens the book with a kicker, letting his audience know that he was raised as a Jehovah's Witness. He goes into detail about his frequent incarcerations, beef with rapper 50Cent, breaking into the music industry and the downward spiral that landed him in prison. I recommend this book especially for young men who grew up without a father and the women who deal with them. I certify this book as a DOPE READ.

Steven Jones says

Ja Rule was underrated as an artist by myself and others. It is only in hindsight that I find myself wishing Rule was still in the public eye and making music again. This book is really based off of letters written during his time in prison where he finally had the time to reflect upon his life and put the story together much like another bio i recently read from Rick James.

The story is the general one from the hood most of the time but Ja tries to make it more meaningful through his letters that are interspersed throughout the book. There he tries to give an overview of his feelings at that moment and the broader societal implications before the book goes into a detailed chapter that follows the theme. Early on the book moves quickly, too quickly in fact. I mean the first couple of chapters lay a good groundwork but then the formative early teenage years are really glossed over, especially as it relates to Ja starting to get into rap. He mentions that he is trying to get into music, but never really gets into the trials of that, was he going to dingy studios? making mix tapes of songs and handing them out? There is some written about writing his lyrics but it isn't in depth at all.

In fact the one thing he does do is sort of over estimate and have an inflated sense of importance of trying to speak on social issues but the insights are little and follow the normal line of thinking from urban communities. The book also fails to fill in a lot of details on teh actual process once he gets signed to Def Jam and the album creation with the exception of a couple of songs. Now I feel like this is because he wants to be this example of growth and self reflection but those moments seem so superficial save a moment in the last third of the book where he talks about reconnecting with his estranged father. In fact the vast majority of the emotional connection and evidence of growth comes from anything involving his pops.

Another thing I didn't like was how the story was organized at points chronologically. I think it takes a lot of weight from his entire set of struggles with the way its set up. He condenses certain parts into the thematic sections when the true weight of what Ja went through isn't as evident. For instance the beef with 50 Cent ends up kind of being the majority of a chapter and doesn't feel natural or like it was the reality. It is sort of like Prodigy's (Mobb Deep) bio where it feels like his role is overly exaggerated. Then the portion that deals with Karrine Steffans is severely minimized and condensed yet in the few paragraphs given, it seems as if it was a major issue for Ja.

Overall it was a strong start but the book lost a lot of steam and I feel like it fell victim to unrealistic expectations on the social impact and a desire to try and keep a lot of useful and interesting information close to the vest. To that end, the chapters about his father and grandparents are really good as are the letters from prison. I just think the storytelling wasn't in depth enough about the things I wanted to know and the editing could have been tighter in regards to sequence.

Byron says

Ja Rule obviously worked with someone to write this book, but ironically it's filled with grammatical errors and typos. Unless he's completely illiterate, I wonder how much worse it would be if he wrote it himself. He may not have had time write a book, presumably having signed the deal with this after he was sprung from the pokey -- he needed to focus on getting back in the studio and on the road, lest he end up locked up again

for tax evasion.

Having said that, I still got a lot out of this. What it's lacking in form and polish -- and believe me, it's lacking quite a bit -- I'd say it makes up for in candor, honesty and the unique perspective Ja Rule brings, having been one of the top rappers out back when hip-hop was near its commercial peak, albeit briefly. I'd compare it to Mark Curry's Diddy book, in that it's got a lot of very interesting information that's destined to remain obscure, because hip-hop heads don't even read the little eight word captions beneath the bootleg audio on blogs, let alone books.

In particular, his take on what ended up happening between himself and Irv Gotti, 50 Cent and Jimmy Iovine, essentially resulting in Irv Gotti being run out of Universal Music despite being instrumental in bringing not just Ja Rule, but also Jay-Z and DMX to Def Jam, seems both highly plausible and also relevant to the current discussion on the rap Internets having to do with "culture vultures" and what have you. The stuff about beating up 50 Cent on multiple occasions seems less that likely, but what do I know. It makes for a few amusing stories anyway.
