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## [Oakland artist and educator Jonathan Brumfield receives top SF State honor](#)

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Jonathan Brumfield

As San Francisco State University prepares for this year's commencement on May 22, its six academic colleges have each selected two graduating students – one undergraduate and one graduate – for the honor of representing their fellow students during the ceremony by wearing

their college's academic hood. Jonathan Brumfield, graduate hood for the College of Ethnic Studies, will speak on behalf of all graduate students.

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Jonathan and his family moved to Oakland when he was 12, a difficult transition for him. A self-described “knucklehead kid who challenged educational systems,” Brumfield struggled in school but found a sense of belonging attending hip-hop events.



San Francisco State University Ethnic Studies Dean Kenneth Monteiro posted this photo on Facebook showing himself “with Professor bell hooks and two of our brilliant graduate students, Arnetta Smith and Jonathan Brumfield.”

“With hip hop, I knew I had a voice, I knew I had a platform,” he said. His involvement in hip hop and interest in aerosol art – commonly referred to as “graffiti” – also kept him out of violent situations, he said.

Brumfield, who will receive a master's of arts in ethnic studies from San Francisco State University, now leads the arts program at Safe Passages, an Oakland nonprofit with the goal of inspiring young people and ending the cycle of poverty. His thesis is titled “Oakland's Urban Hieroglyphics: 21st Century Youth Scribes of Oakland's ‘Graffiti’ Culture.”

He teaches the history of hip hop and aerosol art, using these topics as a tool to connect students to their heritage and personal identities. “Hip hop saved my life, and I am so grateful to be able to save other young people through hip hop,” he said. “All these young people were considered taggers, but I help them explore the context of what they do.”

Brumfield’s thesis also investigated aerosol art and its culture, making links to historic African aesthetics. As part of his research, Brumfield interviewed youth who create aerosol art in vulnerable Bay Area communities, exploring the significance of the art form and common misconceptions about it.

Brumfield has been invited to speak and teach aerosol art practice overseas, including a recent trip to Senegal, where he taught art to youth for several weeks. One of his major life goals is to develop an educational exchange program between youth from Oakland and Africa based on hip hop and aerosol art.



Jonathan Brumfield left this mural behind in Dakar, Senegal, in the shadow of the world-famous African Renaissance Monument. He was there in April teaching art to Senegalese youth.