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Rhetorical Analysis of “Handlebars”

They say that music is one of the greatest expressions of the human soul, and one of the best ways of expressing one’s self. In today’s culture, we see this everywhere, from radio and pop culture idols such as Eminem of Taylor Swift to lessor know indie artists, they all express their views and ideas through music. The song “Handlebars” by the Flobots is no different. It is a song almost entirely written in symbolism and metaphor and is both a look at a potential future and a warning.

Right off the cuff, the song starts off with the chorus, which includes the seemingly innocent enough line of “I can ride my bike with no handlebars”. From this one line we can garner the subject of the song, being someone young, who would be proud of the fact that he can do something that others cannot. This is where the first overarching tone of the song begins, being able to do things that others cannot. In the mind of a child, this seems to be nothing more than that, although to someone older, it speaks of someone being better then someone else. The song then goes into the first verse, which goes on to speak about all the things that the subject can do that others cannot, like scratching a record or tying a knot in a charry stem, things that during the time the song was created were popular with the youth of that time period, but the song starts a seemingly darker overtone with two lines, being “I’m proud to be an American”, and “I can do anything I want”. These two lines, when looked at apart=, don’t seem to be anything significant, but together they speak of an ideal that I’m better then you, my country is better then yours, and I should be allowed to anything I want because of that. During the time period the war in Iraq was fresh on everyone’s minds and 9/11 was still relatively recent. To speak of an idea like that during the time period is pretty disturbing when America at the time almost held the fate of a country in its hands. Not only that but the idea that I can do something that you can’t is escalating in the things that he can do, from riding a bike with no handlebars to being able to do anything that they want. The subject is gaining power, so to speak. However this is only the start of a darker meaning and story for the subject of the song.