

# Refining Your Image:

Eliminate Distractions; Enhance Positives  
Session 1

© *J. Alan Whiteside*

[j.alan.whiteside@gmail.com](mailto:j.alan.whiteside@gmail.com)

## Goals

1. Become more aware of distractions
2. Learn to draw the viewer's eye to your main character

# The Equation:

Eliminating the Negative  
+  
Accentuating the Positive  
=  
Refined Image

# Introduction

# Do We Have a Blank Canvas?

- Other artists start with a blank “canvas”
- Is what we got what we saw?
- Eliminate or include: you choose
- Take a good image to an exceptional image

# Disclaimers and a Caveat

- I haven't perfected my images and I still miss things
- I'm more aware than I used to be
- We're going on this journey together
- *These techniques and approaches do not apply to images that fall into the category of photojournalism or evidentiary photography.*



There are three images that go into a final photograph. The one you envision, the one you capture, and the one you finesse in the digital darkroom.”

- David duChemin

David duChemin





# Foundational Principles of Refinement

# Foundational Principles of Refinement

- Eliminate the negative and accentuate the positive
- Only serve your vision
- Fully engage with the scene, main character
- Treat your image like it's music or architecture
- Be picky and pay attention to details
- Don't make giving a low score easy for the judge



# First Half of the Equation: Eliminating the Negative

# The Negatives: Definition of Distractions

What constitutes a distraction? Anything that:

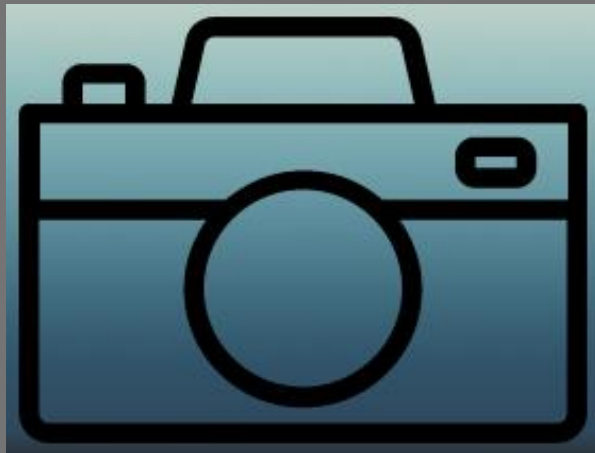
- Seems introduced by the photographer (spot, noise, etc.)
- Makes it difficult to pay attention to the subject
- Draws attention away from the subject
- Disturbs or disrupts the viewer's progress through image
- Doesn't help tell the story, construct the mood, etc.
- Causes a “jarring” experience for the viewer

# Why Do We Miss Distractions in Our Own Images?

We can be critical of *other* people's images, but...

- We're in a hurry to make the edits and post or print it
- We're unaware of how poorly a distraction is perceived
- Our thoughts are dominated by what attracted us to the scene
- Our memories of the experience of being there overwhelm the reality of the image

# Take a Step Back—A Slight Digression



Envision



Capture



Refine



# Take a Step Back—A Slight Digression

Look out for:

- Busy background

# Busy Background



RAW File



# Take a Step Back—A Slight Digression

Look out for:

- Busy background
- Intrusions and visual clutter



# Intrusions and Visual Clutter



Intrusions



RAW Files



# Take a Step Back—A Slight Digression

## Look out for:

- Busy background
- Intrusions and visual clutter
- Mergers

# Merger



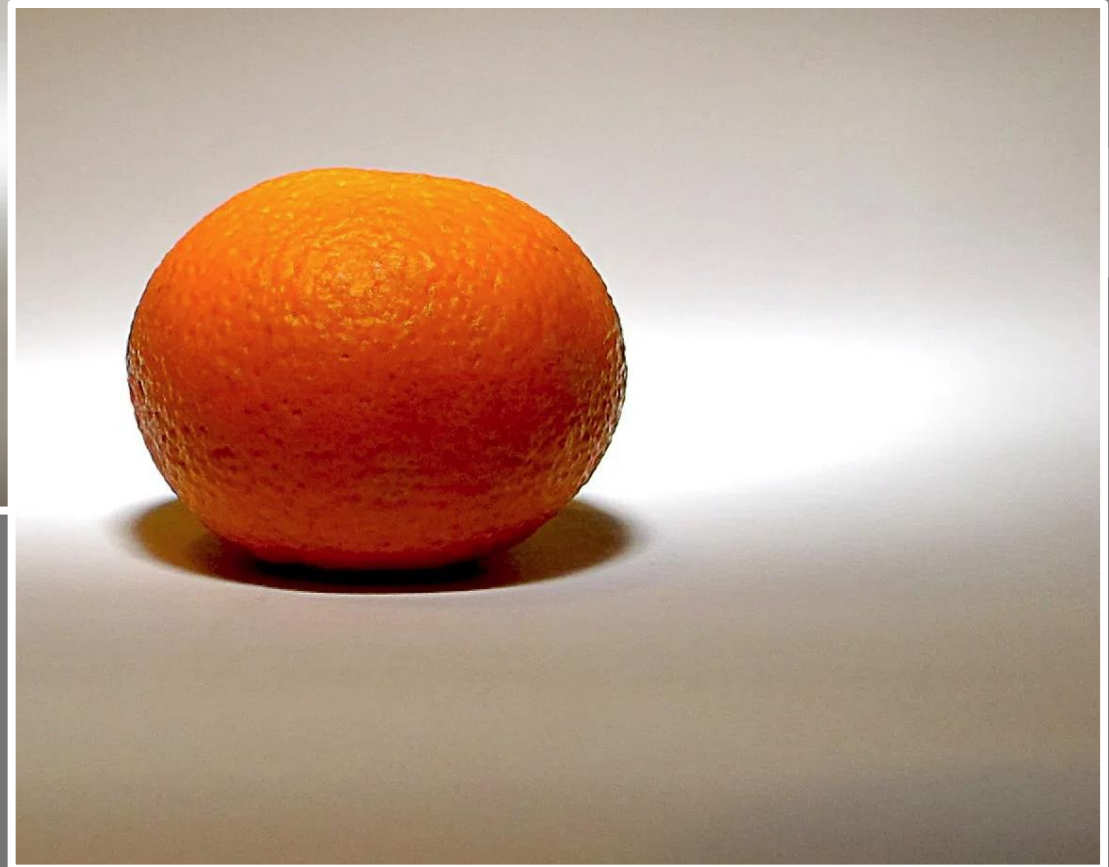
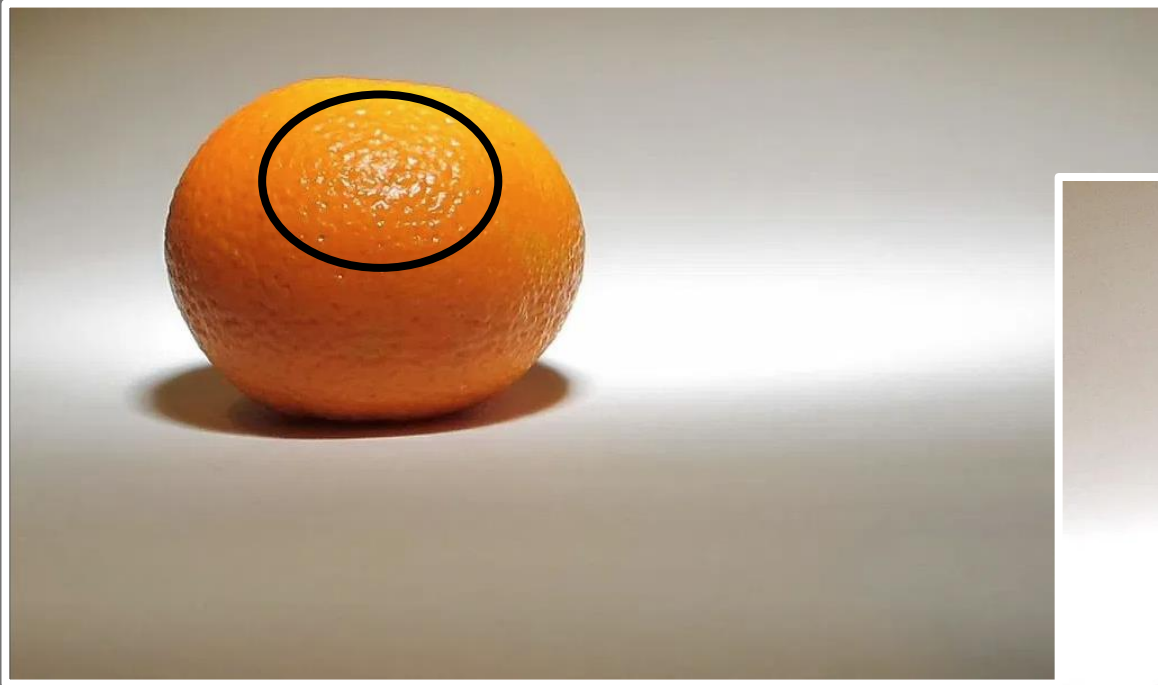
RAW File

# Take a Step Back—A Slight Digression

## Look out for:

- Busy background
- Intrusions and visual clutter
- Mergers
- Bright spots or black holes

# Bright Spots



# Take a Step Back—A Slight Digression

## Look out for:

- Busy background
- Intrusions and visual clutter
- Mergers
- Bright spots or black holes
- Attention-grabbers



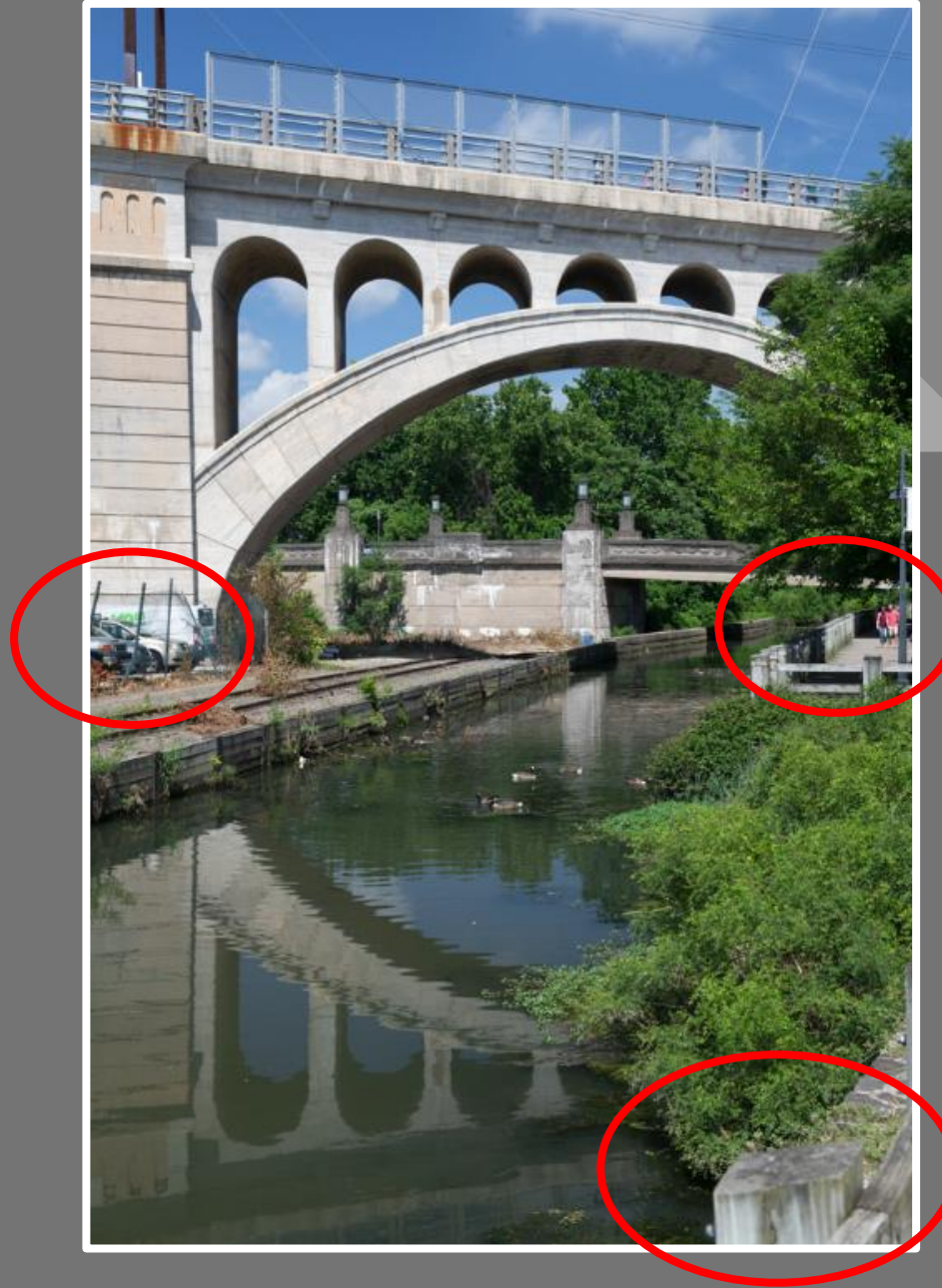
# Attention-Grabbers



RAW Files



# Attention-Grabbers



RAW File



# Attention-Grabbers



RAW File



# Attention-Grabbers



© J. Alan Whiteside

RAW File

Final File

# Minimizing or Removing Distractions

A Tool for Every Job

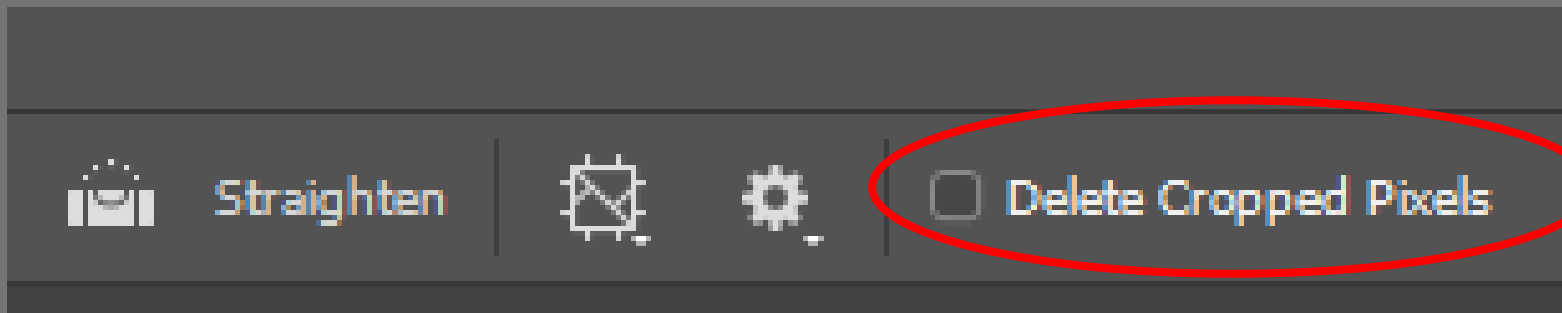


# Cropping

- Use either at beginning or end of workflow
- Removes elements, tells different story, creates different mood
- Provides balance for the image
- Helps simplify an image
- Aspect ratio should fit the image, not vice versa

# Cropping

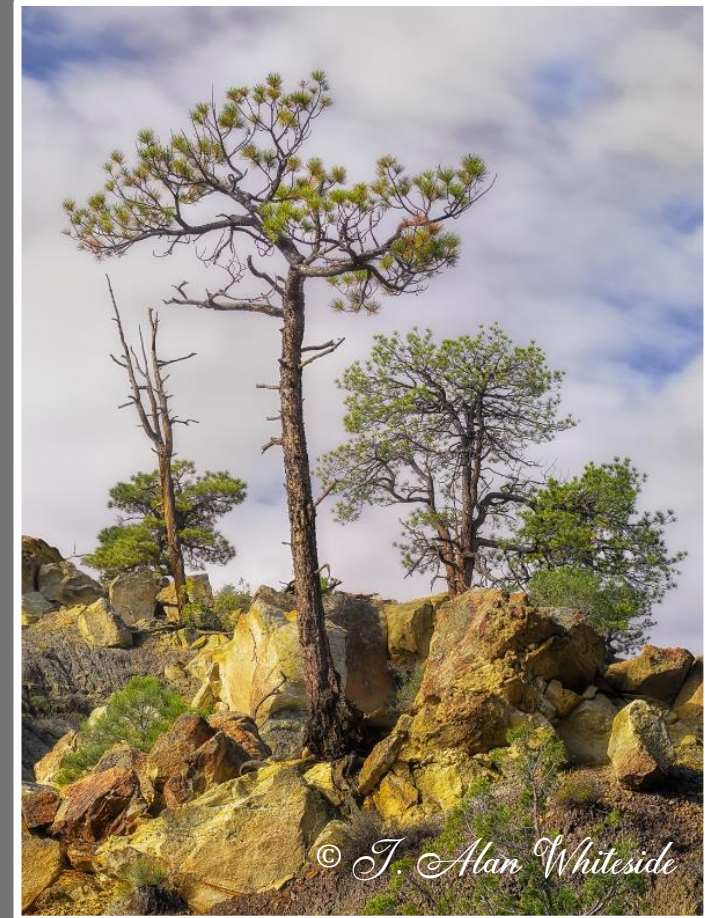
- Experiment with different crop ratios (LR and PS)
- Beware of “Delete Cropped Pixels” in PS



- Cropping first eliminates unnecessary enhancements
- Cropping last gives more time to engage with the image
- Crop should let the image “breathe”



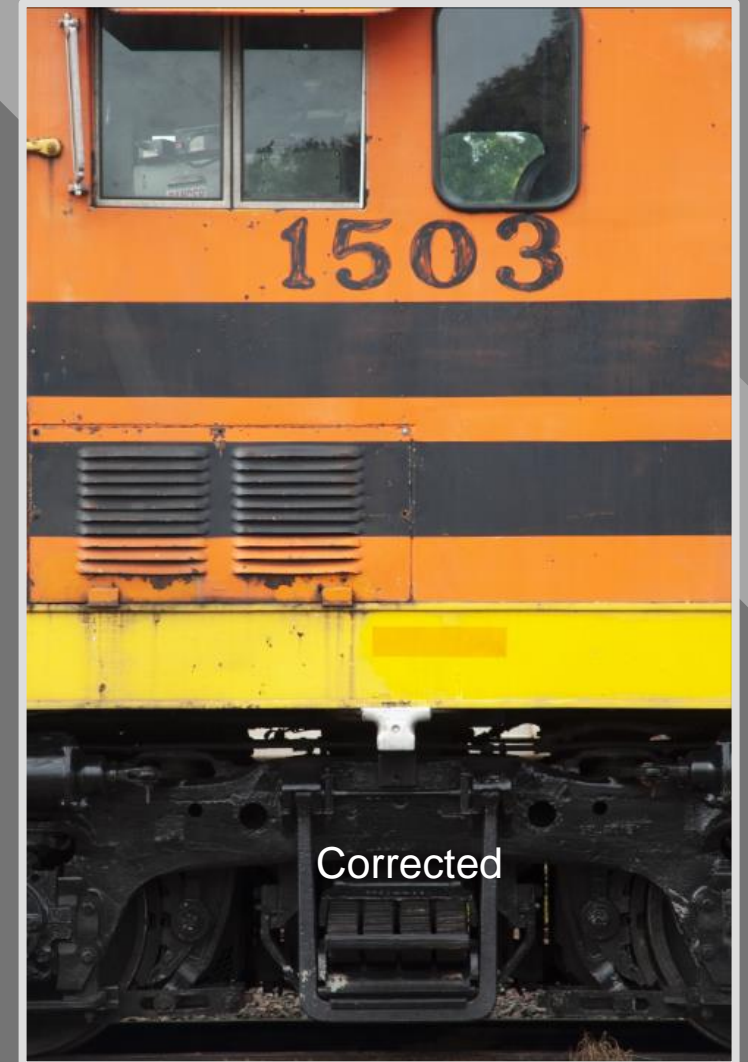
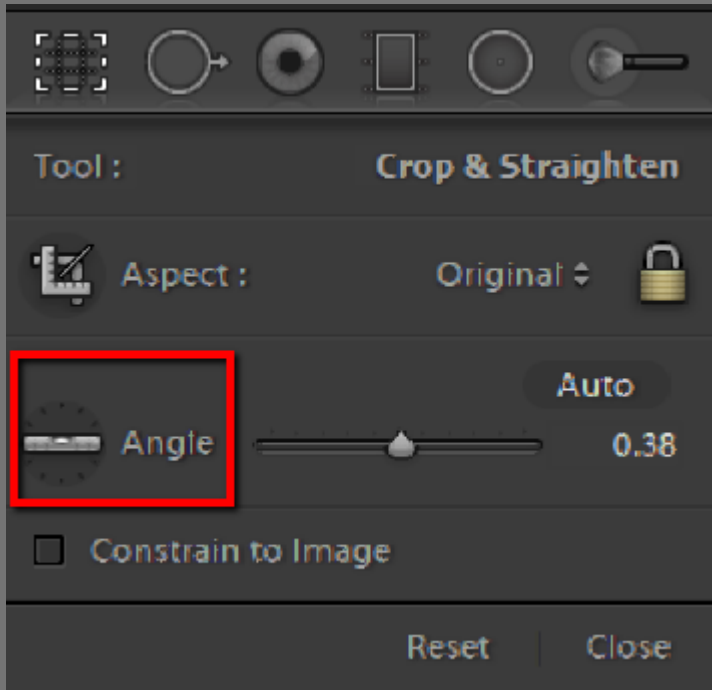
# Eliminating Distractions: Cropping





# Horizon Leveling and Perspective Control

- Viewers often notice tilted horizon first



# Horizon Leveling and Perspective Control

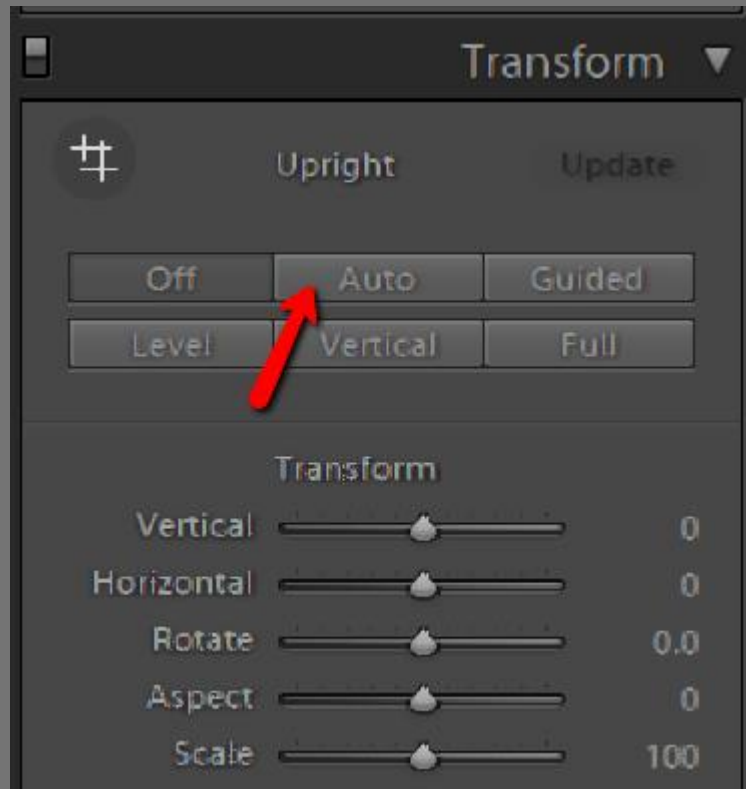
- Shooting upward makes everything appear to be leaning back
- Perspective correction in LR or PS makes the element appear more normal



RAW File



# Horizon Leveling and Perspective Control



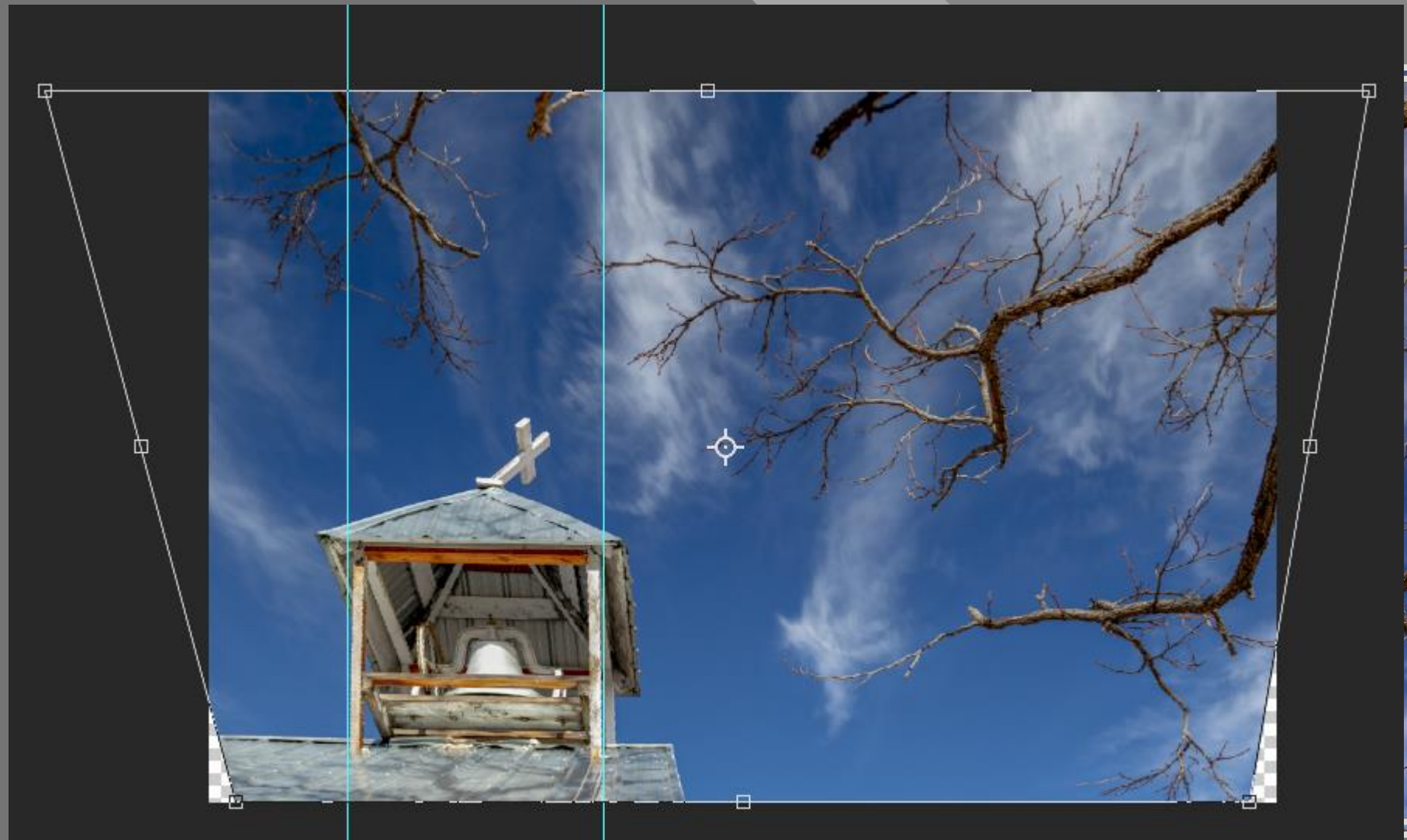
Lightroom  
Transform Panel





# Horizon Leveling and Perspective Control

Photoshop  
Transform  
Perspective  
Interface



# Horizon Leveling and Perspective Control

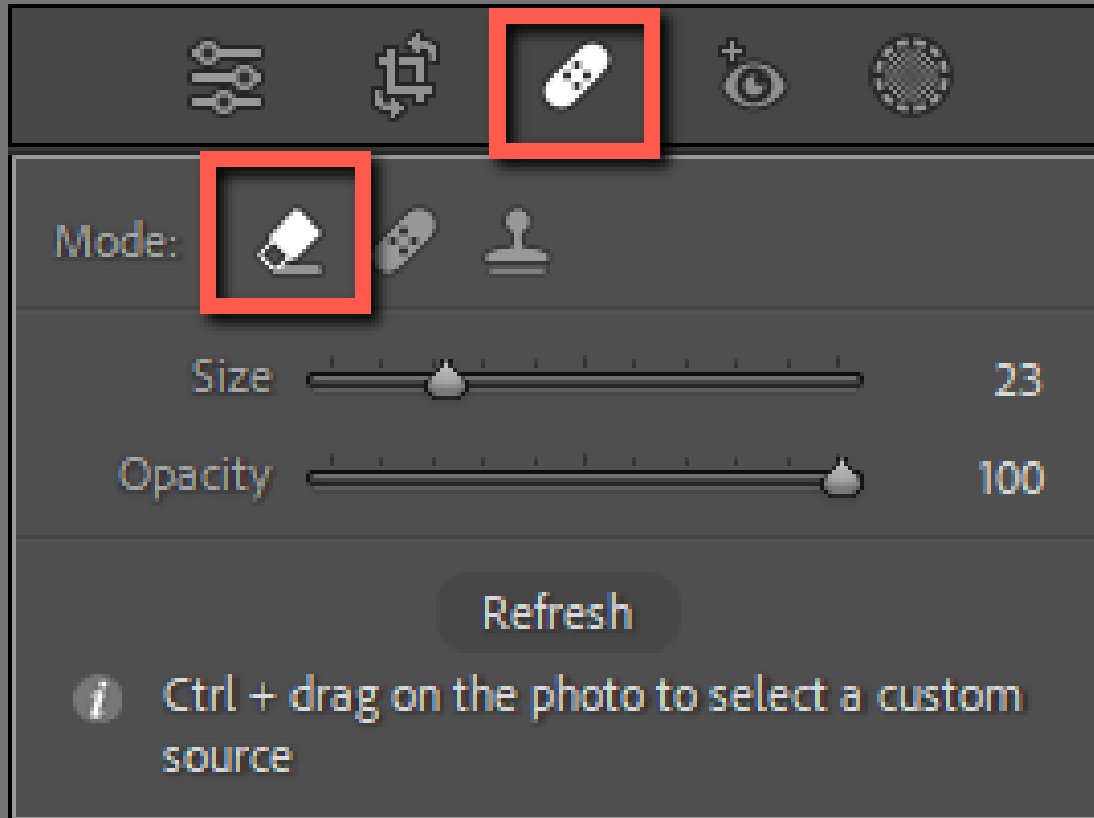
RAW File



Final File



# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Spots, Etc.

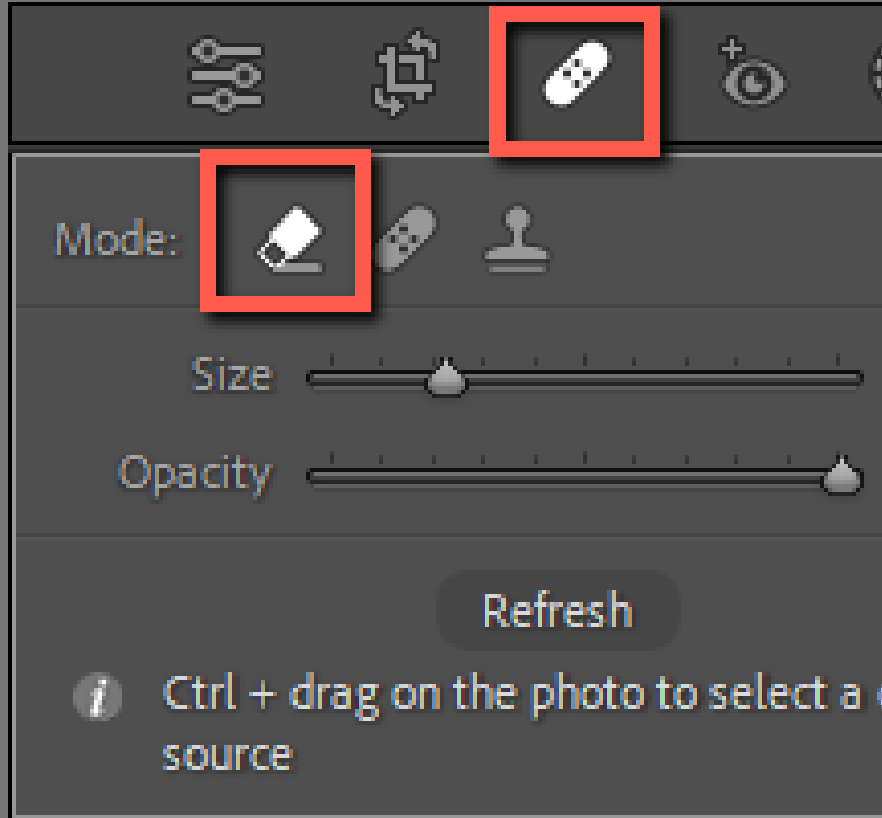


Lightroom



RAW File

# Eliminating Distraction Removing Spots, Etc.



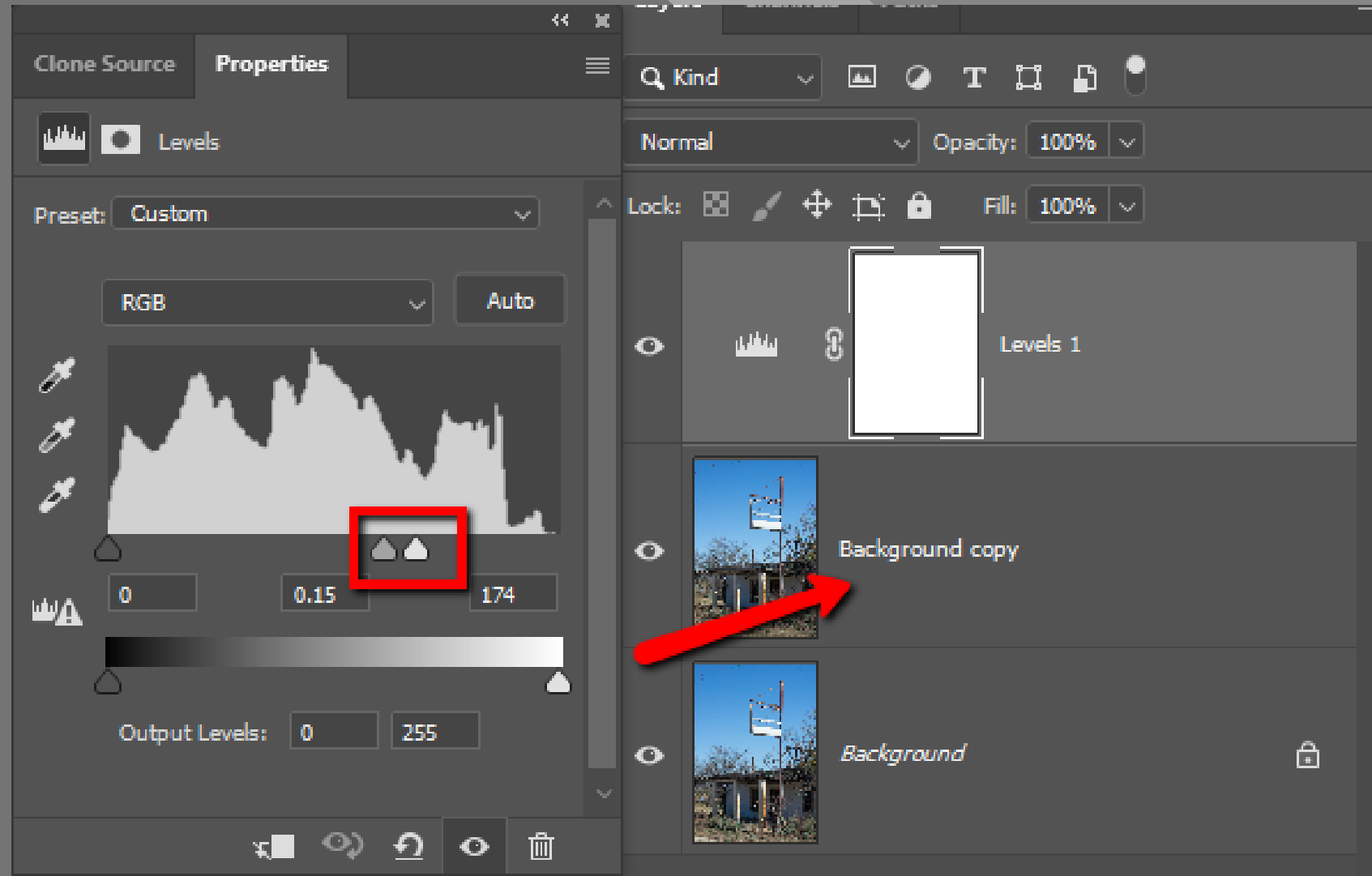
Lightroom



# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Spots, Etc.

- Add Level Adj layer above duplicate Background
- Pull mid-tone and highlight sliders near each other to see spots

Photoshop



# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Spots, Etc.

- Ignore impact of Levels adj. on other parts of image
- Clone out spots on *pixel* (Bkgnd copy) layer
- Delete Levels layer

Photoshop



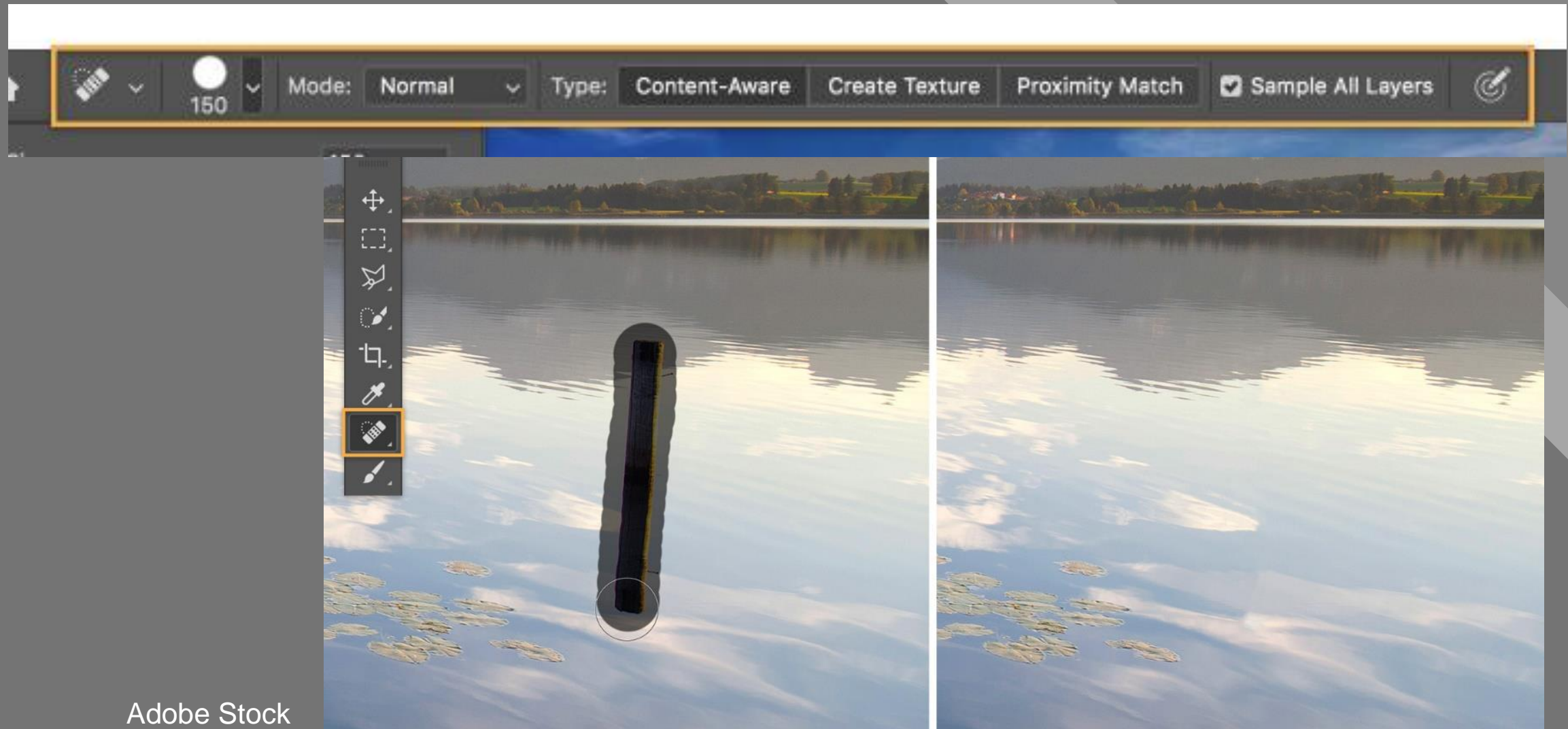


# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Spots, Etc.



Adobe Stock

# Removing Spots and Small Distractions





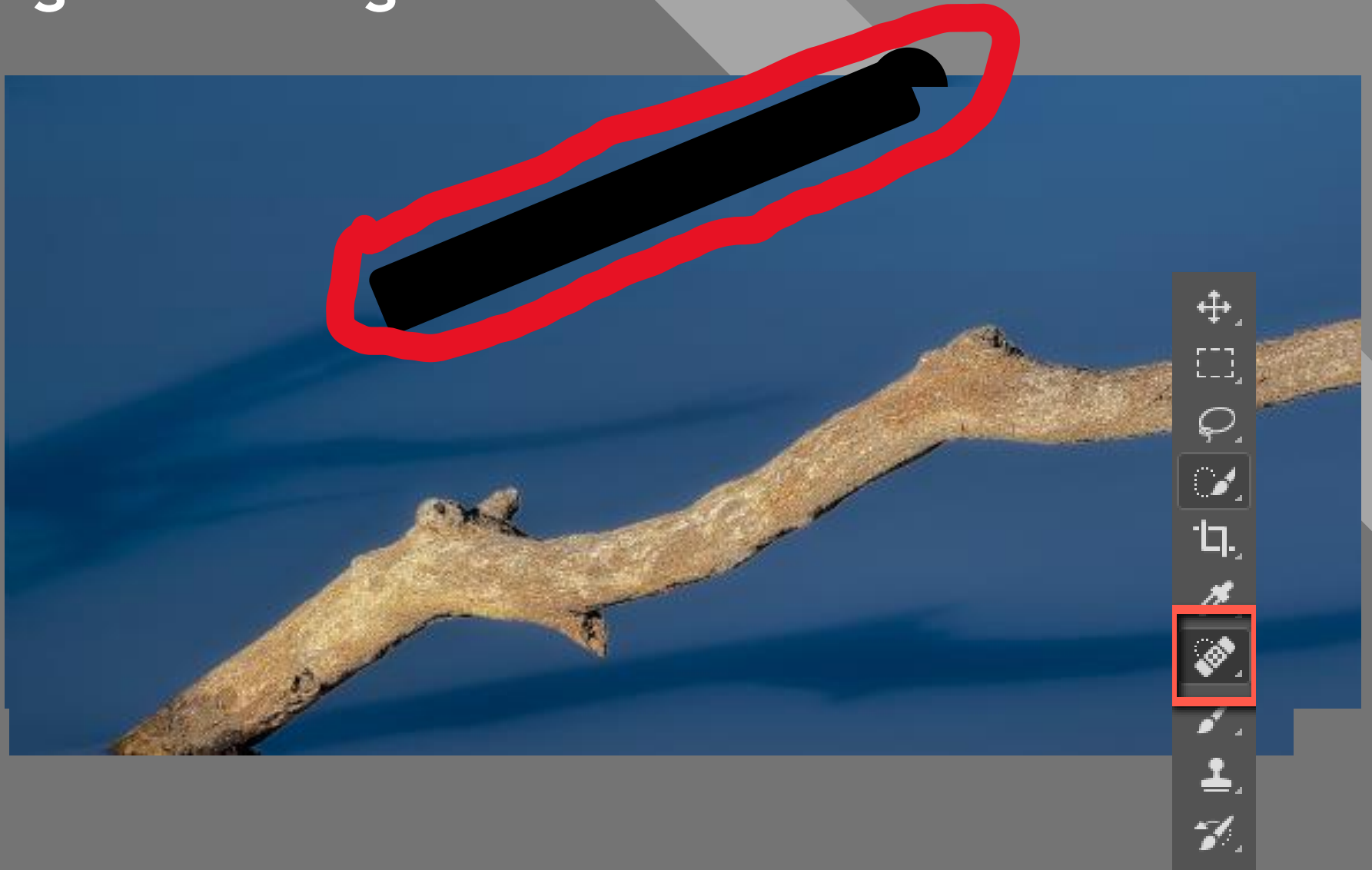
# Removing Spots and Small Distractions



Adobe Stock

# Tip for Removing Distracting Items

- Select Spot Healing Tool
- Click at 1<sup>st</sup> point
- Shift-Click at 2<sup>nd</sup> point

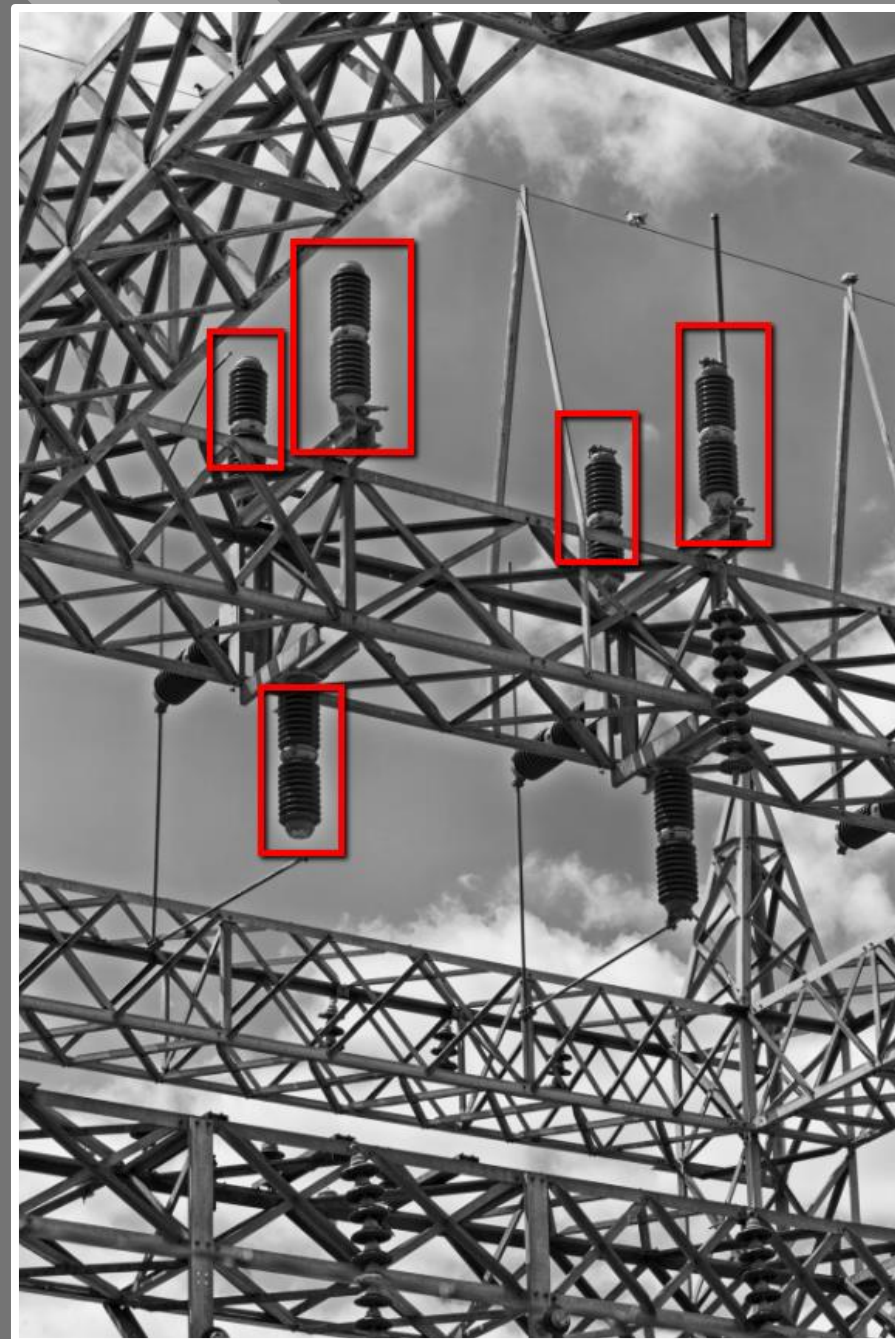


RAW File

# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Halos

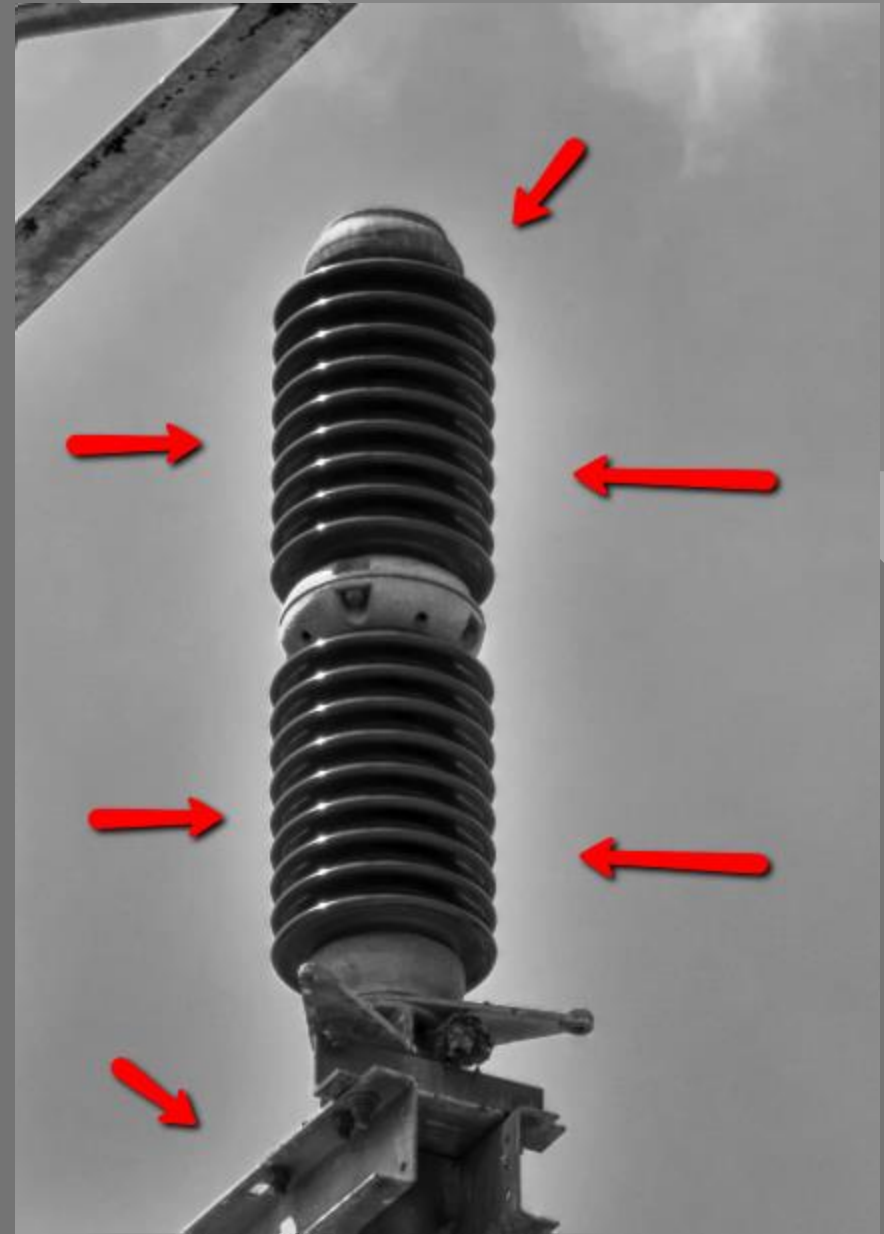
Those nasty light areas  
around dark objects...

RAW File



# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Halos

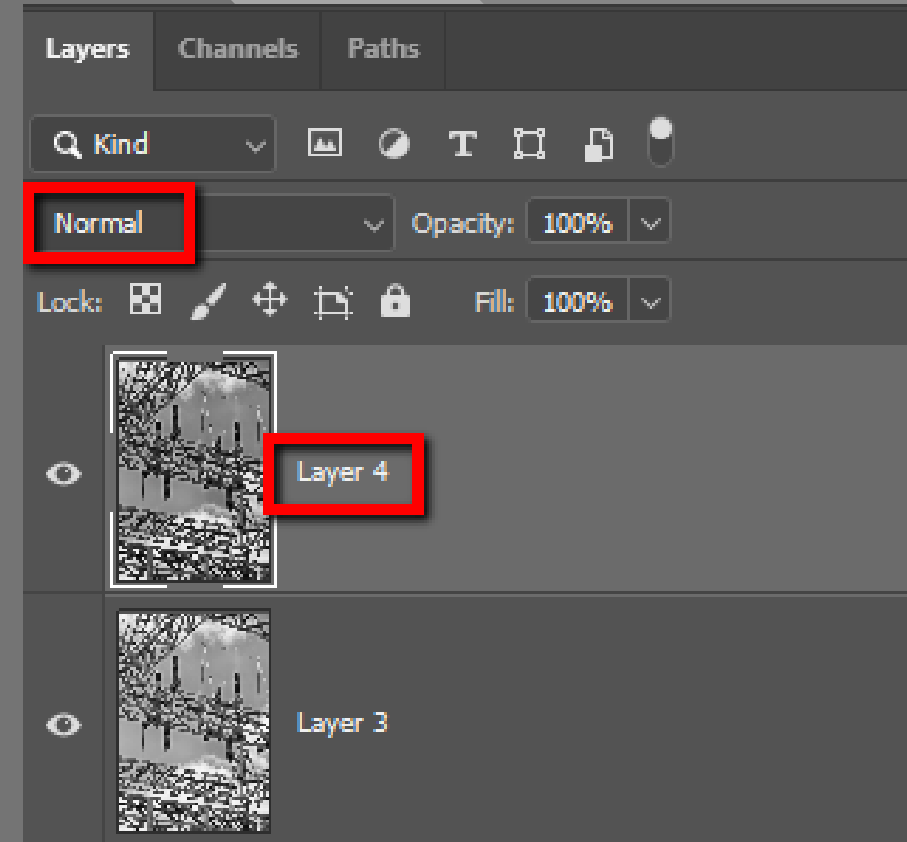
- Identify haloed areas





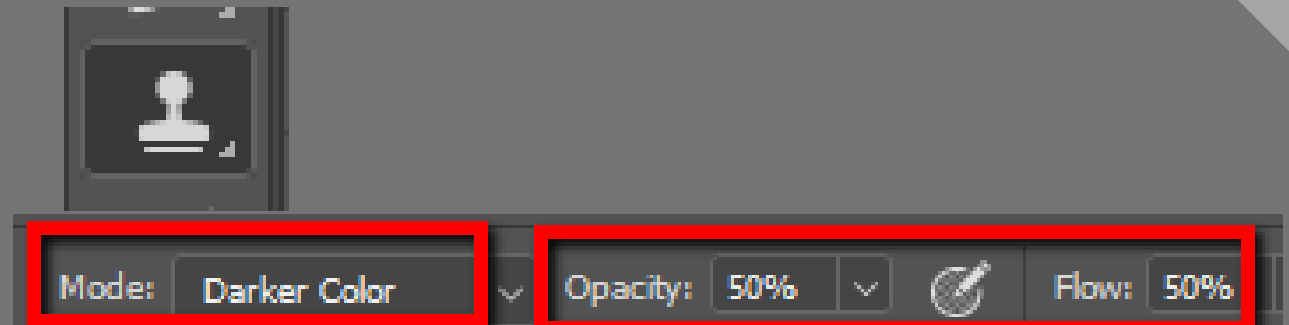
# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Halos

- Identify haloed areas
- Duplicate layer or Merge Visible



# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Halos

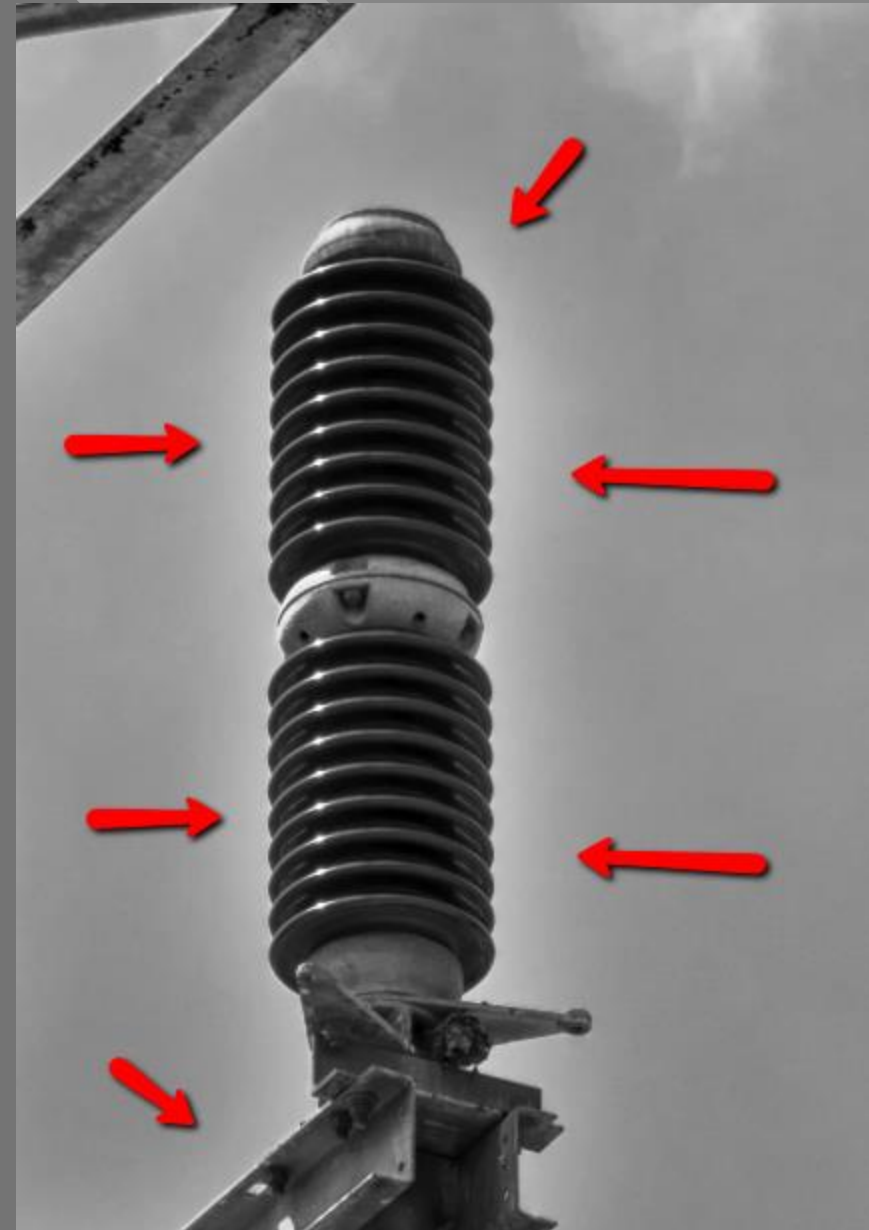
- Identify haloed areas
- Duplicate layer or Merge Visible
- Select Clone tool, medium opacity and flow, and Darker Color blend mode





# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Halos

- Identify haloed areas
- Duplicate layer or Merge Visible
- Select Clone tool, medium opacity and flow, and Darker Color blend mode
- Select Clone tool color from nearby color/tone



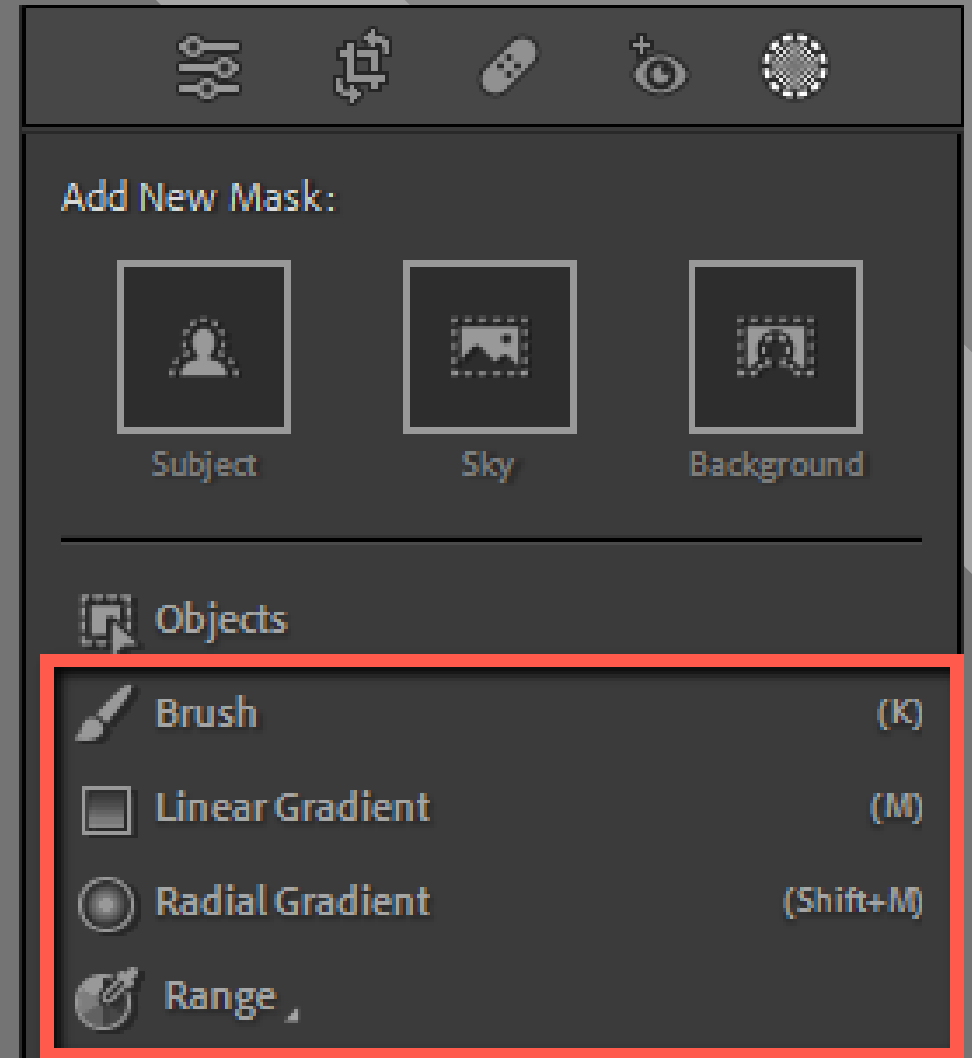
# Eliminating Distractions: Removing Halos

- Identify haloed areas
- Duplicate layer or Merge Visible
- Select Clone tool, medium opacity and flow, and Darker Color blend mode
- Select Clone tool color from nearby color/tone
- Brush along edge with slight overlap



# Distraction Minimizing Strategies

- Lower exposure (brightness)
- Desaturate (but not totally)
- Decrease clarity and texture
- Change hue (color)
- Combination of the above



## Tool Summary (not a comprehensive list)

- Cropping (in camera and in post-processing)
- Horizon leveling and perspective control
- Spot healing (small distractions and more major flaws)
- Fixing halos
- Minimize with brush, graduated or radial filter

# Optional Participation



- **WHAT TO DO:** Submit 1 **unedited** JPEG photo (**1920 x 1280 – competition size**) that you think contains at least one distracting element
- **BY WHEN:** At least a few days prior to next session, June 13th (the sooner, the better)
- **HOW:** [j.alan.whiteside@gmail.com](mailto:j.alan.whiteside@gmail.com)
- **THEN WHAT:** I'll show a few images and discuss minimizing the distractions