Lesson 5 – Color Levels

The image shown below -- while well-composed and framed -- is somewhat "washed out." Colors could be brighter, and the photo contains only a small amount of "true black" color. We can use the levels to improve the photograph.

A slightly "washed-out" photo of *El Castillo* at Chichen Itza

1. Select Adjustment on top bar
2. Choose Levels...
3. The Levels window shows a histogram, with three "sliders" at the bottom of it. The curve shows how color lightness values are distributed in the image.
4. To achieve a true black in the image, move the leftmost slider (circled in red in image) inwards, onto the bulk of the histogram.
5. To adjust the image to have a true white, move the rightmost slider (circled in green in image) inwards to meet the right edge of the bulk of the histogram This will also lighten colors in the photo.
6. The middle slider can be used to adjust midtone values.
7. If you wish, you can also click the Channel: selector and adjust the red, green and blue color channels individually.
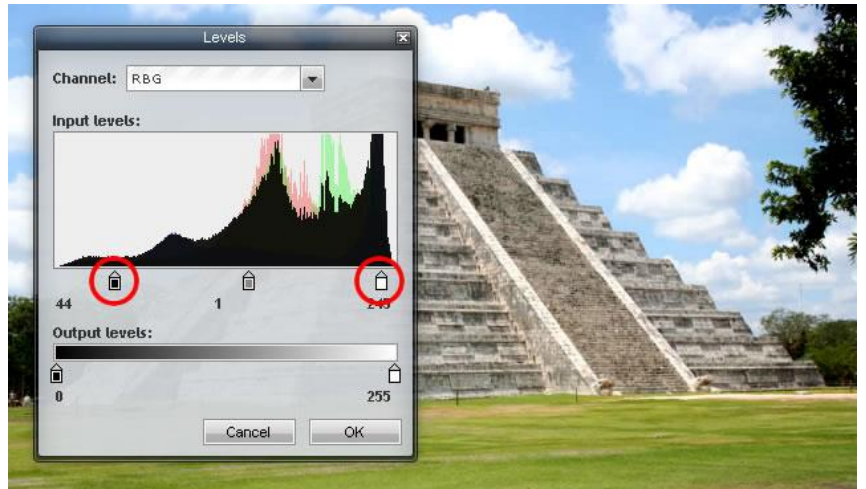

Image before editing levels (left half)   and after (right half).

Color Curves

1. Select Adjustment in the top bar.
2. Choose Curves
3. Use the Channel selector at the top of the window to adjust, Red, Green or Blue channels, or leave it set to RGB to adjust all three at once.
4. Move either endpoint of the line.
5. Click anywhere on the line and drag, to "bend" it into a curve.
6. Click and drag other points to create a complex shape.

Correcting Tonality

Use this to make dark colors more distinct and "brighter." You can also improve the color balance of a picture.

1. Choose Adjustment in the top bar
2. Select Curves.
3. Click the Histogram box to make its shape visible.
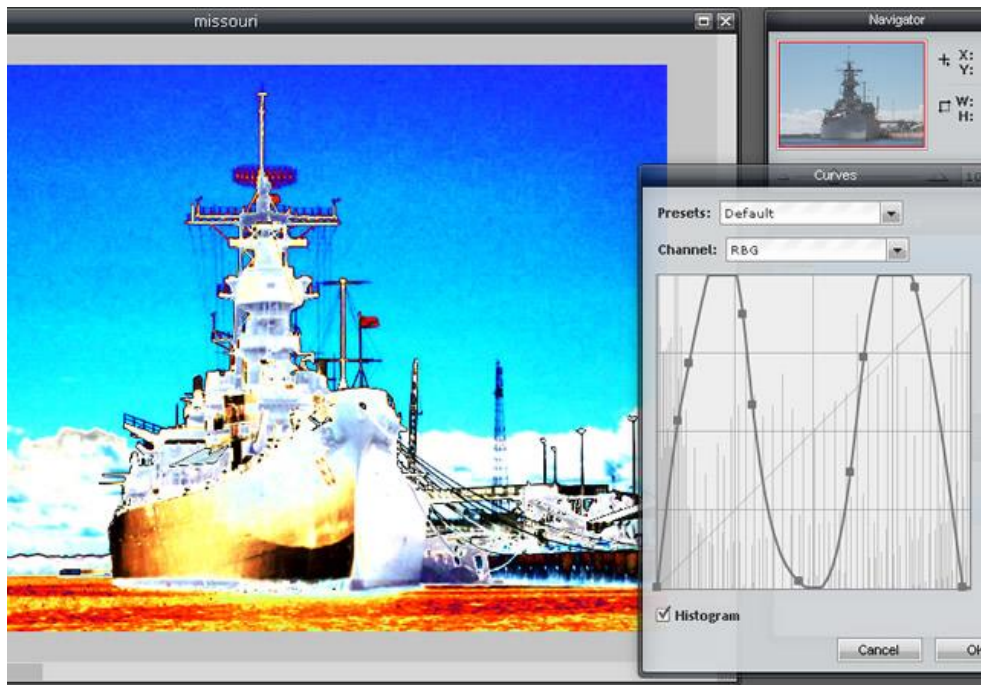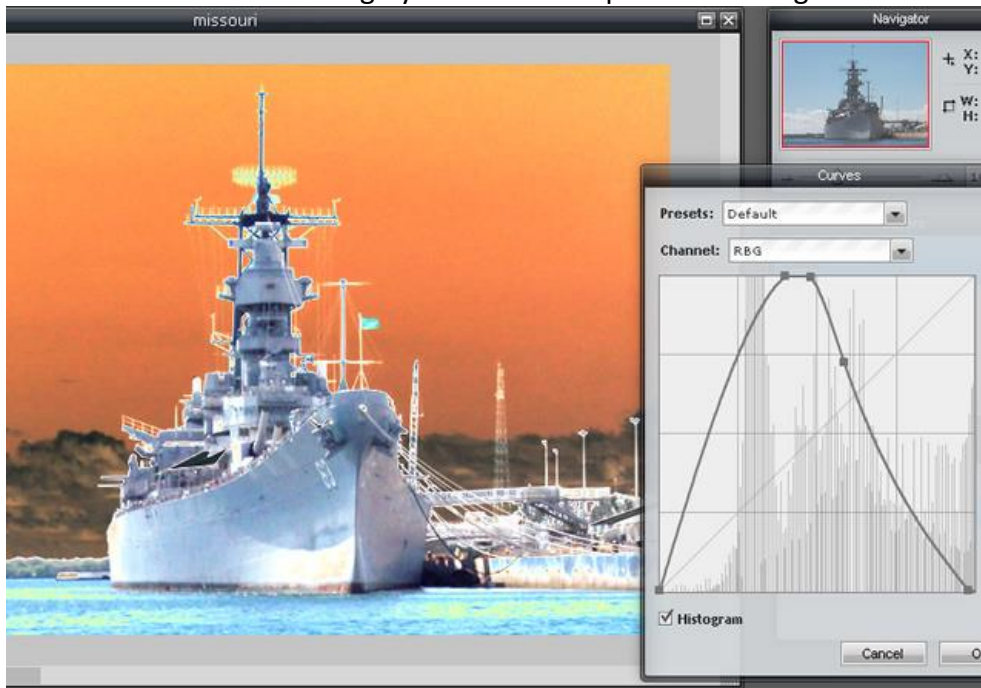4. Move the left endpoint horizontally toward the histogram.

Correcting tonality: Before (left)   and After

"Solarize" Images

1. Choose Adjustment in the top bar
2. Select Curves.
3. Click the Histogram box to make its shape visible.
4. Move the RGB curve to roughly match the shape of the histogram.

Using Color Levels and Curves
Create a Collage of a single object with color edits.
The center image should be the original.

Excerpted from http://www.nisd.net/technology/training/pixlr.html