

Photography by Hamilton

Can you handle the truth?

looking good in a high definition world

Looking good in a high definition world.

“High definition” means HDTV, which offers viewers unparalleled picture clarity, and it makes a lot of familiar on-air personalities suddenly look like drag queens or Frankenstein monsters (the curse of traditional stage makeup) or pock-marked teenagers (what traditional stage makeup used to cover). Congress has mandated that all television broadcasts make the switch from analog to digital signals by February 2009. The major networks are now using their digital signals to air prime-time shows (at least) in high definition. As for hi-def TVs, in 2007 there were an estimated 8.6 million in households nationwide; in 2008, the figure is expected to jump to 38.8 million. In other words, the number of viewers who can gaze not just at a news anchor’s eyes but deep into his or her pores, lip creases and telltale face-lift scars is growing exponentially. And that doesn’t take into account the fact that even home-use camcorders are now available in hi-def. You don’t have to be Matt Lauer to subject your nostrils to public scrutiny.

Meghan Daum, “High-definition anxiety – Technology is putting on-air talent under the microscope -- warts and all,” Los Angeles Times, January 19, 2008.

Pretty soon, I’ll have to trade in the old TV set and the rabbit ears. The next Super Bowl should be even more amazing around here to watch. . As most of our visual world shifts to high definition, photographers also grapple with ways to show people in the best light. High-end digital still cameras of today record incredible detail in everything; which is great for landscapes and product shots. However, it’s not so great for portraits. Still, everywhere you look, there are sanitized images of celebrities; ultra thin and flawless. Many of these images have been achieved after many costly hours of Photoshop. Don’t believe me... compare Oprah – The Color Purple and Oprah – Cover of O Magazine. Most of my clients don’t have Oprah money though.

Film was pretty sharp too! In the days of film, the closest that the subject came to seeing reality was when the proofs arrived. I guess that’s why they were called proofs. Anyway, you would make a selection from the proofs and that image would receive diffusion and/or retouching as part of the enlargement order. This was an affordable solution for portrait sessions, because you were normally dealing with a few images that were shot under uniform conditions.

However, this was rare for wedding photos; except for a few posed formals. Why? With weddings, there were so many candid images and very few could afford the luxury of a retoucher. I remember those days well. I would use diffusion filters and soft lighting to create flattering portraits and wedding images. Wedding photographer, Bill Stockwell, Sr., described it as seeing the wedding day through the “misty eyes” of the bride. I can’t remember ever getting anything retouched.

Flash forward to the digital age and I still shoot the same way. Technique and lighting make a huge difference in digital photography.

The advent of Photoshop brought retouching to the computer screen, but it is still a time consuming process.

“soft lighting is
the best solution
in a high definition
environment.”



Retouched



Unretouched



Diffusion Filter

In the early days of wedding photography, most of my brides did not even use makeup. Then it quickly went from having a friend apply makeup to hiring a pro to do makeup for the entire wedding party. Shows like *Bridezilla* has made it difficult for most brides to even know what is normal. Today, some brides even ask about retouching for their wedding photos. Selective retouching is possible, but costly. One could easily double the photography budget by adding retouching. As the digital workload increases, every photographer must reach a balance that curbs the time spent in front of a computer screen. Shooting is my passion, so I limit the amount of retouching that I do; regardless of price. In the above example, I used soft lighting on Kandace to create an image that looks great even without diffusion or retouching. The goal in the digital age continues to be creating great images. It all starts with lighting.



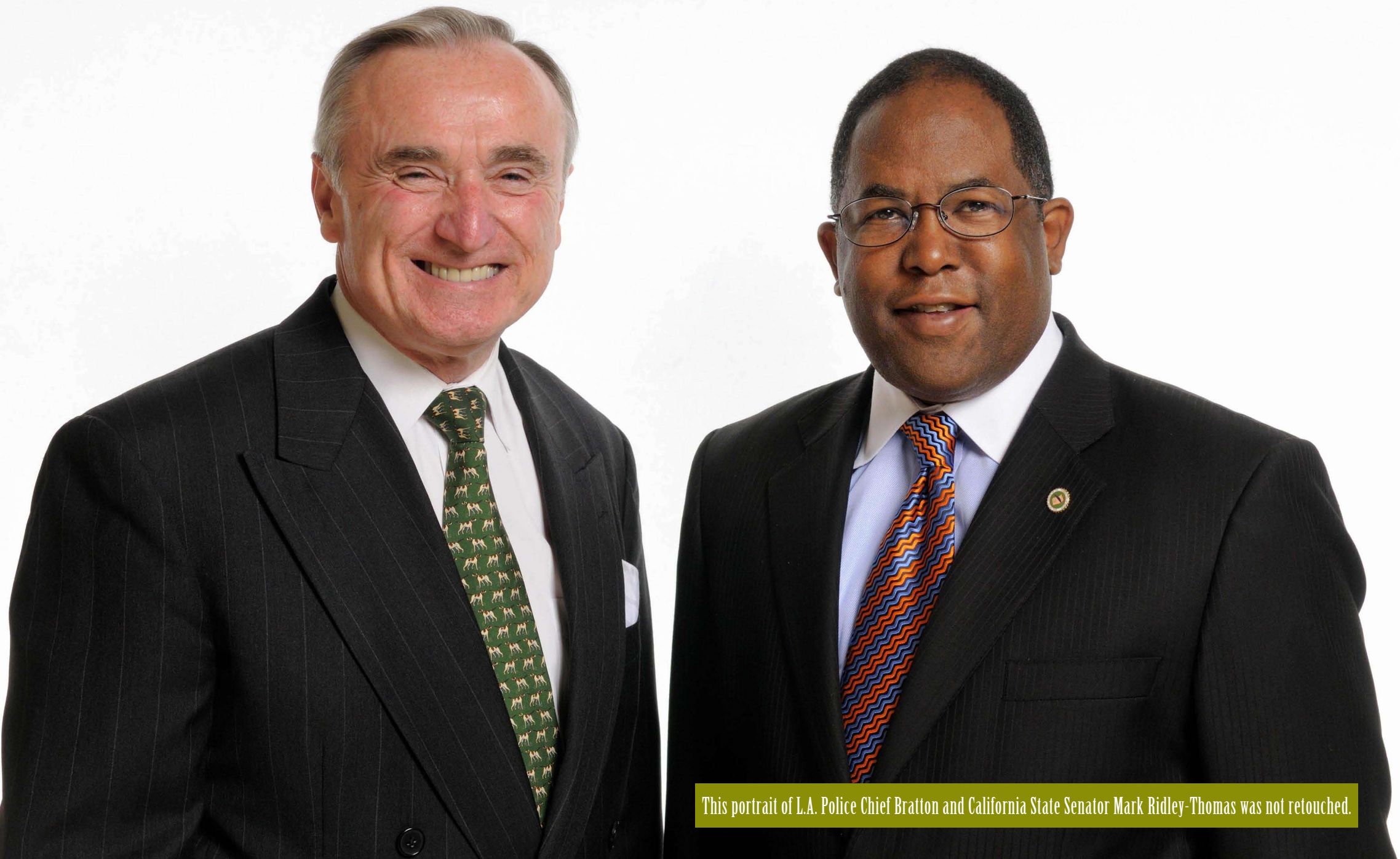


Unretouched portrait at the beach. Small head sizes makes retouching more difficult.

This image was retouched to remove age lines. I normally retouch one image from each portrait session.







This portrait of L.A. Police Chief Bratton and California State Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas was not retouched.



When you need ultimate clarity, there really is nothing like high definition.

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