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modifications and changes will readily occur to those skilled in the art, it is not desired to limit the invention to the exact construction and operation as illustrated and described. Hence, all suitable modifications and equivalents may be resorted to as falling within the scope of the invention. 5

What is claimed is:

1. A method of determining whether a document is identified by a seal, the seal having a characteristic color, the method comprising:

- a) generating an image of the document; 10
- b) searching the image for a suspicious block having at least one pixel of the characteristic color; and

- c) identifying each block contiguous to any suspicious block as suspicious, if the contiguous block also has at least one pixel of the characteristic color, wherein the contiguous suspicious blocks collectively form a suspicious region. 15

2. The method of claim 1 further comprising

- d) classifying the document as non-suspicious if a size of the suspicious region does not substantially match a size of the seal. 20

3. The method of claim 1 further comprising

- d) classifying the document as non-suspicious if a shape of the suspicious region does not substantially match a shape of the seal. 25

4. The method of claim 1 further comprising

- d) classifying the document as non-suspicious if a density of pixels having the characteristic color does not substantially match a corresponding pixel density of the seal. 30

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising

- d) classifying the document as non-suspicious if a radial density of pixels having the characteristic color does not substantially match a radial density profile of the seal. 35

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising

- d) classifying the document as suspicious if the suspicious region has substantially a same size, shape, density of pixels having the characteristic color, and radial density of pixels having the characteristic color. 40

7. The method of claim 6 further comprising

- d) degrading the image before reproduction, if the document has been classified as suspicious. 45

8. The method of claim 7 wherein degrading the image includes substituting another color for any pixels having the characteristic color within the suspicious region.

9. A method of deterring counterfeit reproductions of secure documents having a seal of a pre-determined color, comprising the steps of: 50

- a) partitioning an image of a document into a plurality of contiguous blocks;

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- b) classifying any block having at least one pixel of the pre-determined color as a suspicious block; and
- c) classifying the document as non-suspicious, if no suspicious block exists.

10. The method of claim 9 further comprising the step of:

- d) identifying a group of contiguous blocks with the suspicious block as a suspicious region, if each block in the group has at least one pixel of the pre-determined color associated with the seal.

11. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of:

- e) classifying the document as non-suspicious, if no suspicious region exists.

12. The method of claim 10 wherein step d) further comprises the step of performing a block based morphologic dilation of any suspicious block to identify the suspicious region of contiguous blocks.

13. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of:

- e) classifying the document as non-suspicious if a size of the suspicious region does not substantially match a size of the seal.

14. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of:

- e) classifying the document as non-suspicious if a shape of the suspicious region does not substantially match a shape of the seal.

15. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of:

- e) classifying the document as non-suspicious if a density of pixels having the pre-determined color does not substantially match a corresponding pixel density of the seal.

16. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of:

- e) classifying the document as non-suspicious if a radial density of pixels having the pre-determined color does not substantially match a radial density profile of the seal.

17. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of:

- e) classifying the document as suspicious if the suspicious region has substantially a same size, shape, density of pixels having the pre-determined color, and radial density of pixels having the pre-determined color as the seal.

18. The method of claim 17 further comprising the step of:

- f) degrading the image before reproduction, if the document is suspicious.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein step f) further comprises the step of substituting another color for any pixels having the pre-determined color within the suspicious region.

20. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of:

- e) performing the reproduction only if the document is classified as non-suspicious.

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