

THE MAHELE (READING 1) – Exhibit B

Land Ownership



Kamehameha III, Kamehameha III

The Right to Own Land The right to own land in Hawai'i was the major demand made by foreigners. They wanted to buy land but land in Hawai'i had never been sold. These foreigners did not understand the Hawaiian attitude towards land. In their western cultures owning the land one lived on was a right. They felt that they should have this right in Hawai'i too.

Many foreigners wanted to start businesses in the islands. Some had already done so. How could they be sure their investments would be safe if they did not own the land? Some foreigners needed large areas of land in order to grow plantation crops such as sugar cane. This would not be possible, they thought, without owning the land.

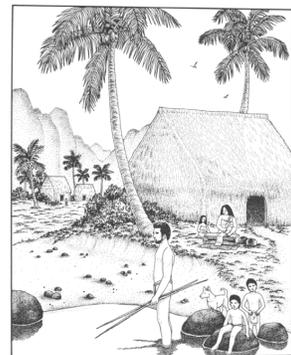
Demands by foreigners for land increased. Kamehameha III felt the pressure. In 1841 the king offered the foreigners long-term leases of land. A lease is a contract by which a person rents land for a certain period of time. The king hoped that this offer would satisfy the foreigners. But the foreigners wanted to own the land, not "rent" it. They looked upon this offer as an attempt to deprive them of their rights to own the land.

Then there were those foreigners who believed that owning one's land would benefit native Hawaiians as well. As owners of their own property, they would gain self-respect and achieve a higher level of status. They would be freed from their obligations to the chiefs. Ultimately, by owning and working on their own lands the Hawaiians would be more productive and benefit greatly.

The Hawaiian Belief

The idea of owning the *āina* (land) was hard for Hawaiians to grasp. In Hawaiian culture no individual owned land—it belonged to the *akua* (gods). The *mo'i* (king) and his *ali'i nui* (high chiefs) controlled the land while the *kono'hiki* (lesser chiefs) managed it. The *maka'āinana* lived on the land. In return they gave the *ali'i nui* their service and a portion of what they produced.

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The chiefs did not want changes made in the Hawaiian land system. Some felt that they would lose control over the land, the people who lived there and the products made by them. The chiefs also feared that foreigners would gradually gain control of the kingdom. What would happen to the *maka'āinana*? How could Kamehameha III safeguard the rights and welfare of his own people?