

King Kamehameha III

This daguerreotype of King Kamehameha III was taken around 1850-54. Also known as Kauikeaouli, he was the son of Kamehameha I and inherited the throne in 1824 when his older brother Kamehameha II died while visiting London. Kamehameha III ruled from 1824 until his death in 1854, the longest reign of the Kingdom's eight monarchs. During his 30-year reign the Kingdom experienced rapid cultural, political and economic change, including the establishment of Christian churches and schools, growth of western commerce and trade, and the establishment of the first sugar plantations.

Two legal events highlight Kamehameha III's reign. The first occurred in 1843 when a British warship under the command of Lord George Paulet sought to annex the Kingdom of Hawai'i for Britain. Kamehameha III protested. Five months after Paulet's seizure, the British government restored the Kingdom. In his restoration speech, Kamehameha III declared the future motto of the State of Hawai'i: "*Ua mau ke ea o ka 'āina i ka pono.*" The motto is often translated as: "The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness." Hawaiian language scholars have pointed out, however, that a more accurate translation reads: "The sovereignty of the land has been continued because it is just."

The second event was the Great *Mahele* or land division beginning in 1848. Before the *mahele*, the land and natural resources were held in trust by the chiefs and their representatives, who granted use of land and resources to native tenants. Under increasing pressure from foreign business interests, in 1848 this system of land tenure was radically altered.

The *mahele* instituted a system of private property ownership that ended the traditional land tenure system by dividing the land among the crown, the government, the *ali'i* (chiefs) and *konoiki* (headmen). Concern for the commoners' rights resulted in the Kuleana Act of 1850, which permitted land ownership by Native Hawaiian commoners who occupied and improved any portion of the lands controlled by the *ali'i* and *konoiki*. Additionally, government lands were made available for purchase by commoners and foreigners who did not have kuleana rights. Within decades, title to thousands of acres had fallen into the hands of non-Hawaiians. Even the crown lands, owned by the King and his successors, were often sold or leased to foreigners in payment of debts or in exchange for foreign goods and supplies.



A daguerreotype of Kamehameha III, c. 1850-1854.