



WASHINGTON EXPERIENCED CHEERS AND BOOZE

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January 1, 2004 -- BEFORE our good mayor, Mike Bloomberg, bans laughter and booze, feel not, ye of little faith, guilty about your indulgence of being overserved last night.

You see, and take note, Mayor Mike, booze is good politics according to the father of our country, George Washington.

"George Washington, in part, lost his first elective bid for the Assembly in Virginia because his rivals spent more on booze for voters," Eric Burns was saying.

Burns, a Fox News media analyst, has just written an intriguing history on booze, "The Spirits of America."

When Washington ran again for election, he told his staff, "Do not spend with too sparing a hand" when it came to booze at the ballot box.

"They took notice and he won," said Burns.

Burns makes me feel so good about myself.

"If you were a reporter in those days, checking entry or exit polls, you would go to the vats of rum or hard cider outside the voting tents provided by the candidate," said Burns.

"Voters were offered a ladle of booze. The vat which was the emptiest would usually tell the reporter who was the potential winner."

Burns, from exhaustive historical research, not on-the-job training, says that alcohol was America's first national pastime.

"There wasn't a single abstainer among the founding fathers, and they and their generations drank from morning to night, perhaps starting the day with rum or brandy and ending with a mix drink called hotchpotch.

"The truth is the colonists cared about booze more than freedom."

Like most social observers, Burns decries the advent of Prohibition, reporting that the 18th Amendment, which prohibited the drinking of alcoholic beverages, remains to this day the only constitutional amendment ever repealed.

Furthermore, the hootch was dangerous, such as Squirrel Whiskey.

"Its ingredients were a secret, but its name, it is believed, comes from the tendency of people who have taken a few sips to try to dig their feet into the sides of trees and run up to the top branches," said Burns.

This man has had a video camera running on me.

Burns is a social drinker who has a very occasional rum and coke . . . Argh, what a piker.

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