One of my favorite television shows when I was a kid was “Perry Mason,” if only because there was no moral ambiguity concerning the outcome of every episode. No matter how compelling the evidence against Mr. Mason’s client, the counselor’s shrewd deductive powers and dynamic oratory ensured that the actual guilty party always broke down and confessed before the final credits rolled.

If only life, and boxing, were so cut-and-dried.

Now, when I watch TV, be it a fight card or updates on President Obama’s rushed-through-Congress, trillion-dollar stimulus package, my prevailing sense is that justice, at best, is only occasionally served. Like the real culprits who attempt to escape detection in one of those old “Perry Mason” episodes, much of what we hear are lies and distortions because, well, the powers-that-be don’t apparently think much of John Q. Public’s ability to comprehend anything. It is as if we are small children being told to eat the rest of our vegetables because kids in India are starving, as if one thing had to do with the other.

Now I have to wonder, was it ever any other way? Now that we celebrated another Presidents’ Day, are the White House icons of long-ago eras really as squeaky-clean as we were told in history class? Would Abraham Lincoln have been hailed as “Honest Abe” had there been bloggers, the Internet, 24-hour news stations and talk-radio back in the 1860s? And how many of those diggers of dirt, dedicated to the skewering of elected officials, are capable of passing the sniff test themselves?

Once I believed, or wanted to believe, that good triumphed over evil far more often than not. Maybe you did, too. But now we have become a society of cynics, skeptical about nearly every public pronouncement from those in high places. If Perry Mason were to pass the bar today and put out his shingle, he could expect a low approval rating as a matter of course because, well, he’s an attorney. Which would place him in the same leaky boat with politicians and the media, other groups that, rightly or wrongly, are widely viewed as serial prevaricators.

I was again reminded of my heightened wariness when two high-profile boxing figures with whom I have had periodic cause to disagree, WBC president Jose Sulaiman and Top Rank founder Bob Arum, issued recent statements that offered little room for disagreement. It was like being told, “Now, kids, there are vegetables on your plate and those children in India are still starving. So shut up and eat the rest of your Brussel sprouts.”

Less than a week after tarnished baseball heroes Alex Rodriguez and Miguel Tejada were forced to admit they had lied to Katie Couric (A-Rod) and to a grand jury (Tejada) about their past use of anabolic steroids, there was a quite remarkable statement from Senor Sulaiman concerning the “innocence” of Antonio Margarito and the improper hand wraps he would have worn into the ring for his Jan. 24 bout with Shane Mosley had those wraps not been detected.

After the California State Athletic Commission – itself no paragon of virtue – suspended Margarito's license for a year, along with that of his trainer, Javier Capetillo, Sulaiman sent out a memo that stated that Margarito was "innocent" of any culpability in the matter because the CSAC's investigation had determined that he didn't really know what Capetillo was doing when he applied the hand-wraps.

Uh, that would be the same CSAC whose on-site inspector at the Staples Center in Los Angeles personally observed the illegal wrapping and then attempted to dissuade Mosley's trainer, Naazim Richardson, from pressing his rights when he arrived after Margarito's hands were already gloved up.

This is part of the release sent to media outlets by the WBC:

"The WBC, founded 46 years ago and formed by people who have vast experience in boxing, can not conceive that a boxer is suspended because of a bandaging, as the only people responsible for it are the managers, the ones who solely execute such an important responsibility without ever receiving instructions from their fighters on what to use in the bandaging or how to use it. The fighter always trusts his managers widely, and he only extends his hands and moves them the way the manager tells him to do it.

"On June 16, 1982, in the fight between Luis Resto and Billy Collins, in New York, just to give an example from many there are, some banned substance was found in the gloves worn by Resto, who won the fight, and due to that fact, manager Carlos `Panama' Lewis was suspended for life, but Luis Resto was not involved at all, and not only that, his win was confirmed as such, without any modification.

"WBC president Jose Sulaiman, in order to confirm or modify his own experience regarding bandaging, as a fighter he used to be in his early youth, and after being in the locker rooms of thousands of bouts throughout his 60 years in boxing and 33 as WBC president, decided to personally call several great champions, being Vitali Klitschko, Larry Holmes, Tommy Hearns, Michael Spinks, Gerry Cooney, Julio Cesar Chavez, Erik Morales, Ruben Olivares, Carlos Zarate, Lupe Pintor, among many others, ALL of whom confirmed without exception that during their careers they had nothing to do with their being bandaged, and that their managers were exclusively responsible for such action.

"Based on the previous facts and many more pieces of evidence that will be obtained, the Mexican boxing authorities, in a very respectful and amicable way, will request the California State Athletic Commission to extend the courtesy of sending all the prescriptive documents of the case, to immediately proceed to submit a respectful but firm appeal against the suspension that Antonio Margarito who is ABSOLUTELY INNOCENT without a doubt, was placed on; Margarito should be restored his damaged prestige and dignity."

Arum, who brandishes his law degree from Harvard as proof that he is smarter than any of his would-be detractors, was perfectly willing to throw Capetillo under the bus if it meant a free pass for Margarito, who, of course, is under contract to Top Rank.

“Obviously, the trainer was using these wraps. He says it was by mistake or whatever, but he’s tainted. He did it,” Arum said in a conference call with pesky media inquisitors last week in advance of Saturday’s split-site doubleheader PPV in which WBC/WBO middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik was to defend his titles against Marco Antonio Rubio in Youngstown, Ohio, and Miguel Cotto was to swap punches with British challenger Michael Jennings for the vacant WBO welterweight crown in Madison Square Garden.

“The California commission is tainted because they deprived a young man of his livelihood after finding him innocent of any wrongdoing,” Arum continued. “That offends me as somebody who graduated from law school. It offends me as an American. Americans don’t punish somebody who is proved to be innocent of any wrongdoing. That is what is a blemish on boxing.”

Square those sentiments against those of Cotto, who was beating the snot out of Margarito in their WBA welterweight championship bout last July 26 before the Mexican began to gain the upper hand, wearing down the Puerto Rican titlist with heavy blows that, in retrospect, now appear to potentially be heavier than they should have been.

“I think, if it’s up to me, we should all abide by the rule that was made,” said Cotto, who clearly is resistant to drinking the Kool-Aid Sulaiman and Arum are ladling out. “(Margarito) was suspended for a year; he should be suspended everywhere. He has to abide by the rules and I think if he can’t fight in the United States, he shouldn’t be able to fight at all.

“This is not a good thing for boxing. It gives boxing another black eye. You go into the ring thinking you’re all playing by the same rules. This is sport, this isn’t a slaughterhouse. This is about boxing to the best of your abilities. We should all go into the ring and be ready to fight with what we have, our own abilities and our own preparation.

“All I know is when everybody gets their hands wrapped, they know what’s in them. They know if something’s in their hand-wraps or not. As a fighter, you know if something’s in there.”

In response to Cotto’s ire toward what he believed was a competitive edge gained by Margarito against him, Arum said, “Miguel is certainly entitled to his opinion. I have expressed my opinion. I don’t say everybody has to agree with me.”

Here in this space, I get to offer my opinion, and I also don’t say that everybody has to agree with me. But TSS readers aren’t as gullible as some would like to believe, so consider this body of evidence for yourself and arrive at your own conclusions.

Sulaiman’s recital of Resto’s “innocence” of improprieties in the 1982 bout against Collins is specious in that Resto admitted only last year that he was completely aware that he had entered the ring with the equivalent of brass knuckles after Lewis had removed much of the horsehair padding from his gloves with tweezers through a pin hole.

The WBC is headquartered in Mexico City, and evidence of WBC executive rulings that have benefited Mexican fighters throughout Sulaiman’s presidency is overwhelming. For exhibits A and B, let us turn to the twice-screwed Pernell Whitaker. On March 12, 1988, Whitaker

thoroughly outboxed WBC lightweight champion Jose Luis Ramirez in Paris, only to find out he was being tagged with a split-decision loss, the first blemish on his career.

Even more egregious was the majority draw that Whitaker, then the WBC welterweight champion, was obliged to accept in his Sept. 10, 1994, title fight with the legendary Julio Cesar Chavez in San Antonio. A pro-Chavez crowd of 63,000-plus in the Alamodome didn't protest the decision, instead silently accepting the gift that had been presented to their hero.

When Whitaker's handlers demanded an immediate rematch with Chavez, Sulaiman didn't even acknowledge the controversy concerning the dubious draw. The Senor's position was that "Sweet Pea" had retained the title on the draw, so there was no need for him to do it again with Chavez.

Now let us consider the March 17, 1990, junior welterweight unification matchup between Chavez and Meldrick Taylor. Taylor was too far ahead on points on two of the three official scorecards to lose a decision when he got floored late in the 12th and final round by a crushing overhand right by Chavez. Referee Richard Steele stopped the fight and awarded Chavez a technical-knockout victory with only two seconds remaining, which might or might not have been the proper call. But ask yourself: If the situation had been reversed, and Chavez been the knockdown victim while ahead on points, would Sulaiman have tried to overturn the outcome? Or at least have mandated an immediate rematch?

Lest anyone forget, Sulaiman was prepared to go along with promoter Don King's thinly disguised attempt to rob Buster Douglas of his newly won heavyweight championship after Douglas knocked out Mike Tyson in the 10th round of their Feb. 11, 1990, title fight in Tokyo. King argued that Douglas had benefited from a "long count" in the eighth round, after he had been knocked down by Tyson, and Sulaiman and WBA president Gilberto Mendoza announced at a press conference six hours after the fight that they would not certify a winner until the executive committees of their respective organizations met later in the month.

The public smelled something rotten, and the immediate outcry got so loud that Sulaiman and Mendoza did a quick about-face and confirmed that Dougas was indeed the champion.

I also have to smile when I think of Sugar Ray Leonard winning both the WBC super middleweight and light heavyweight championships on Nov. 7, 1988, the night he stopped WBC 175-pound titlist Donny Lalonde in the ninth round. Although WBC rules allegedly prohibited such double-dipping, Sulaiman told me allowances were made "for those who write the history of boxing in golden letters." That was an obvious reference to Leonard, who no doubt was willing to fork over a heftier sanctioning fee for the right to become the first fighter to win championship belts in five separate weight classes.

When I asked Senor Sulaiman to send me a copy of those WBC rules he refers to so often, my request went unanswered. To my knowledge, no accredited member of the media has ever received copies of WBC rules, or rules from any world sanctioning body. Such documents exist, we are told, but we are asked to accept what the Sulaimans and Mendozas tell us are in them as a matter of faith. Eat all your vegetables, children.

If you think this is a screed condemning only the WBC, think again. The WBA exceeds even the WBC when it comes to naked grabs for sanctioning fees, once telling us it was OK to have an “interim” world champion, “regular” world champion and “super” (unified) world champion in the same weight class. Three guys with claims to the same organization’s title.

The IBF, of course, is the American sanctioning body whose then-president, Bob Lee, served 22 months in Lewisburg (Pa.) Federal Prison for six convictions, including racketeering, money-laundering and tax evasion.

The scary thing is that maybe boxing is just a microcosm of what our country is becoming, if it hasn’t already. Only a month ago, our new president pledged “transparency” in the workings of government, and that everything would be done in “the light of day.” Almost immediately, he and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi began pushing a trillion-dollar spending bill that few members of Congress have had time to read or digest. It’s already been passed by the House of Representatives and could soon be enacted into law if the Senate follows suit and President Obama affixes his signature, despite the fact many of our elected officials have said they have not been given time to study the bill’s provisions.

But that is not to say that one political party or the other is more righteous than the other. President Bush had those never-discovered weapons of mass destruction to justify the invasion of Iraq. President Clinton looked right into a television monitor and insisted that he “never had sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.”

When it comes to what version of the truth we choose to believe, it pretty much boils down to what political party in which we are registered voters. Should anyone really expect boxing and boxing fans to be held to a higher standard?

Personally, I’d like that trillion-dollar spending bill to include a few million dollars to guarantee that political hacks aren’t appointed to state commissions primarily on the basis of their contributions to the party in power … to ensure that inspectors know what the rules are and are prepared to uniformly enforce them … and that Naazim Richardson, who apparently is the only guy who can tell Plaster of Paris from regular gauze, be named grand high poohbah of hand-wraps.

The feds are all over baseball’s steroid scandal because, let’s be honest, they care about baseball. Barry Bonds must be busted for the good of the country! Now, go up to Capitol Hill and ask the first congressman you see if he knows who Antonio Margarito is, or what the penalty should be for his trying to enter the ring with loaded fists.

What’s scary is that an entire era of baseball has been forever tainted by the specter of performance-enhancing drugs. Is there a computer to upwardly adjust, say, Mickey Mantle’s home-run total if he had been juicing throughout his career? Our heroes of the recent past are now a pack of cheats, and whatever innocence with which we viewed the game they played has been stolen from us.

Can it be like that in boxing? Should we now wonder if the most devastating knockouts of our

memories were the result more of doctored gloves and hand-wraps than of all-natural punching power? Is Antonio Margarito now the equivalent of the disgraced Rafael Palmeiro or Miguel Tejada? Is Jose Sulaiman's decree of Margarito's innocence as flimsy as Mark McGwire's testifying before Congress that he's "not here to talk about the past"? Or is the Senor's statement positive proof that Margarito was a clueless dupe of a nefarious trainer?

Forget Perry Mason. The courtroom drama that is most apt here is the classic scene in "A Few Good Men" in which Navy lawyer Daniel Caffey, as portrayed by Tom Cruise, hammers away at smirking Marine Corps Col. Nathan Jessup, a role that Jack Nicholson was born to play.

Somebody ordered a Code Red. Margarito, who has fought long enough to know if his hand-wraps gave him an extra boost, was prepared to carry it out. As for the rest of us …

Maybe we can't handle the truth.