

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Ledger

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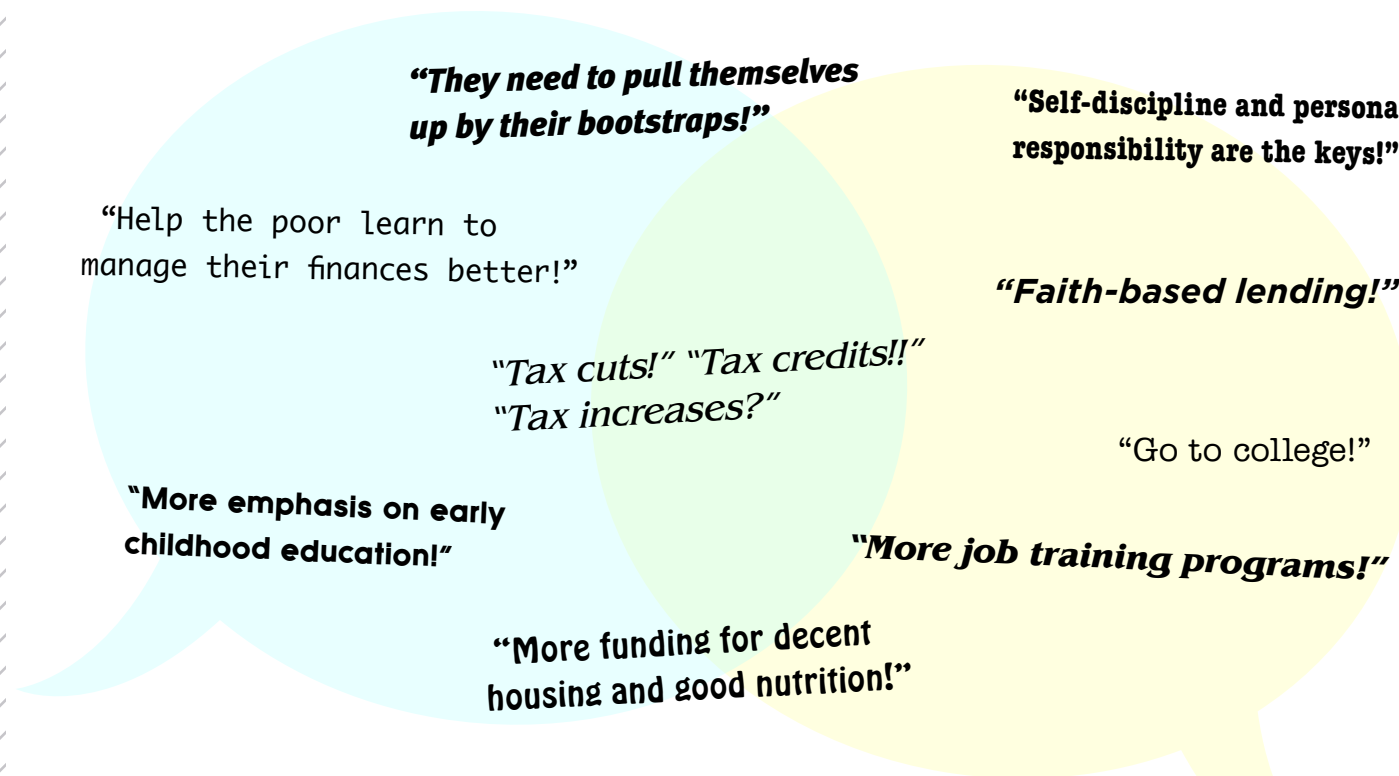
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Ask a hundred randomly-selected Americans for their ideas on how to end poverty, and you're sure to get a range of opinions:



But overall, the views people hold are likely to reflect either of two broad philosophical outlooks. One emphasizes personal responsibility, self-discipline, and private charity; the other leans more towards government involvement, public funding, and professional expertise. In short, we Americans don't agree on the most effective way to address poverty or, for that matter, on a definition of "need."

That's nothing new, of course. Disagreement over the nature of poverty and the debate over how to address it are both part of a long-running narrative that stretches all the way back to Jamestown.

This issue of *The Ledger* looks at three aspects of that narrative: 1) the recurrence of certain themes in America's response to poverty, 2) the ongoing discussion over how to define and measure poverty, and 3) some of the more notable efforts to document the lives of poor people and raise awareness of poverty.

A few words of caution: Don't look for scholarly analysis or policy recommendations in the pages that follow. (I'm not qualified to do the former and not foolhardy enough to attempt the latter.) The goal of this issue is to provide broad, accessible background information that might serve as a basis for further discussion of what has been – and continues to be – a formidable challenge.

The usual disclaimer: As always, the opinions expressed herein, do not reflect the official views or positions of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston or the Federal Reserve System ... even if you agree with every word.

Robert Jabaily, Editor

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