“PLACES IN THE HEART” [1984] While not a GREAT film, it is very well done and was nominated for many Oscars. Sally Field won her second Oscar and the screenplay by Robert Benton [who also directed] also won. There are excellent performances by Danny Glover and John Malkovich, who had not been in very many films at that point. The cinematographer was Nestor Almendros, one of the greatest of the last fifty years.

The film is set in 1935, during the “Great Depression,” and is based on Robert Benton’s childhood memories of Waxahachie, Texas [near Dallas] in that period. The film was shot in that town. One reason for seeing the film is that we hear a lot these days of the Depression being another time of foreclosures and other economic disasters. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president in 1935 and was a hero to poor Texans. This was a time when Texas was both segregated and a place where the Republican Party barely existed. The shift to the Republicans began in the 1960s. This was a time when Social Security was only starting and there was no Medicare/Medicaid or food stamps. Very few people graduated from high school, especially in rural parts of Southern states.

In some ways, the film is a complete package when it comes to the kinds of things considered in a social science class precisely because they are still contentious problems: Social class, race, roles for women/gender issues, religion, disability issues, coping with natural disasters, parenting, and the like. Another basic question the film addresses is that of power and exploitation; also who is in and who is out [inclusion/exclusion]?

Much has been made of the very “Christian” ending of the film. As one critic observed, it stresses that the “family circle must not only remain unbroken but should be expanded to include all the dispossessed.” There is a concern for forgiveness and redemption as well as an implicit questioning of who in the town is truly Christian.