I am saddened I cannot be with you in person. I appreciate that Professor Sue E. Houchins has agreed to accept the Darwin T. Turner Best Essay Award on my behalf.

I would like to thank the editorial board of *College Language Association Journal* and those who made this decision for thinking of my article, “The Verb is No: Towards a Grammar of Black Women’s Anger,” as intellectually valuable. I am humbled that this labor, this work (that is w-o-r-k and w-e-r-q), has been recognized in this space, especially because of *CLAJ*’s commitment to the rigorous scholarly analysis of the lives of Black folks. This germ of this article started out as a part of panel #43, “Creolizing the Academic Space, Expanding Fronteirs,” in Dallas, Texas at CLA 2015 with Sheila Smith McKoy, Emma Waters Dawson, and Stacie McCormick. I am filled with gratitude for the genuine nature of that space and the generosity of those women and that audience. It moved the meager close reading I had to being a set of more substantive questions.

That panel was chaired by the incomparable pair: J&J, Janeen Price and Jenise Hudson. Both of them are, in the words of Fabolous,
“a movement by themselves but a force when they’re together.” They morphed the panel into the special issue in which my article appears, entitled, “We Were Not Invented Yesterday”: Conversations on Being Black Women in the Academy. I will be forever grateful that they trusted and supported me in this work. Their keen editorial eyes made the entire issue a smashing intellectual success. I’m honored to be among that number. A special thank you to my friends who read drafts – Ayesha Hardison, Cassandra L. Jones, and Nikki Brown – since their invaluable feedback transformed this from being solely an analysis of Claudia Rankine’s Citizen: An American Lyric to saying much more about the validity of Black women’s anger. Their magnanimity, in the truest sense of its Latinate roots where magnus means ‘great’ and animus, ‘soul,’ has been a source of rich accountability and community.

When I think about my article and its intellectual contribution, I consider that it traces the instantiations of Black women’s anger from Claudia Rankine’s discussion of Serena Williams, to Serena Williams’s quiet refusal of anger, to the primal screams of Frederick Douglass’s Aunt Hester to not argue about Black women’s anger. I declined to
use the essay to argue (a new methodological approach for me), but rather opened the space of the essay to “add to the provocation of how we understand Black women’s anger in this moment” (17). Contrary to the common understanding in the cultural zeitgeist, I find that Black women’s anger is usefully productive, disruptive, and communal. I am most proud of the way the essay forced me to combine literary and cultural analysis with a meditation on theories about funk, erotic praxis, performance, capitalism, and Afro-pessimism. This essay was a labor of love because it required I participate in a different kind of pedagogy. This is the kind of instruction where I taught myself how to read and write about a subject the English language was never designed to describe. Of course, we know why the linguistic imagination here has been so paltry. There are few grammars (pace Hortense Spillers) that allow for the validity of Black women full stop. We have to create our own. I truly believe what I wrote: “As the title says, the verb is no. Quite frankly, if you are not already convinced of the necessity and legitimacy of Black women’s anger, I am not sure this essay is for you” (17). The footnote reads: “The current colloquial
addendum is ‘Bye, Felicia’ ” (17).

CLA family. I am not with you because I am in the hospital. I have been experiencing a protracted illness since Christmas 2017. I am not just frustrated or hurt or grieving. I. Am. Angry. I am asking people, in the words of Kai M. Green, “What do we do with the scars of those of us who did not die, but still aren’t free?” Or, from Danez Smith, “how does joy taste when it isn’t followed by will come in the morning?” I refuse the easy narratives of overcoming or pity often ascribed to or foisted on those who are chronically ill. I refuse the emotional vacancy of the stereotype of the stoic, strong Black woman. I refuse to pathologize myself or others. I hold onto the reality of my anger without reservation or regret. It is a real reaction to structural and material realities that currently shape my existence as a disabled Black woman working as a professor. This is when and where I enter. This anger is a part of that. It produced this article. It disrupts structural inequality. It brings together my community. This award acknowledges all of the above and that Black women’s anger is intellectually and politically solid ground, not to be dismissed. It is
another way of saying, “Look at my arm.” It is also another way of asking Lucille Clifton’s questions: “won’t you celebrate with me/what i have shaped into/a kind of life? i had no model./born in babylon/both nonwhite and woman/what did i see to be except myself?” With gratitude and, yes, your anger, celebrate with me. Thank you.