What was Howard Zinn’s intention in writing “Unsung Heroes”?

Howard Zinn is best known for one of his books, “A Peoples History of the United States”. The book presents a departure from the standard telling of American History. It presents history from the point of view of the suppressed and uncovers many American “heroes” to be suppressors and criminals. “Unsung Heroes” follows the same line of thought. It enumerates explicitly false heroes that are often found among former US presidents and military people. Zinn reminds us of the crimes each of them has committed. He suggests that these undue idols be taken off their pedestals and be replaced by real heroes, people who have sacrificed something to make a change, even if it was a small one.

Being a war-opponent and social activist, Howard Zinn’s most likely intention in writing “Unsung Heroes” was to educate people about the mistakes (and deliberate lies) that are, in his opinion, very common in the perception of American history. Also, he likely wanted to direct attention towards the un-credited but “true” heroes who may not be shining enough to fit the common definition of a hero, but who have made meaningful contributions and therefore deserve to be remembered. In any case, they are people who are not responsible for killings of native Americans or the suppressing of minorities.

Despite the popularity of Zinn’s views and of “A Peoples History of the United States”, there is an opinion that Zinn is overly pessimistic in his interpretation of the past. Further, some people complain, as he states himself, that they feel “thoroughly alienated and depressed” after reading the book. Thus another objective of “Unsung Heroes” may be to address those people who cannot let go of the beliefs they had about their history. Zinn argues that it is perfectly right to be proud of the past and to admire heroes. But only as long as the right events and people are chosen. He gives numerous examples of people he considers worthy of being admired and remembered.

Overall, Howard Zinn’s main motivation for writing “Unsung Heroes” seems to be his desire to bring about a shift in public opinion about the history of the United States.