Youth protest movements did exist in Nazi Germany. The Nazi propaganda of the time would have had the world believe that the youth population of Nazi Germany was fully behind Hitler. It is true that many did join the Hitler Youth movement but in 1936 membership was made compulsory and all other youth movements were banned so there was no alternative. However, there were some youths who were ideologically against the regime and who were brave enough to make a stand.

**The Swing Youth**

Early in the winter of 1939-1940 several hundred Hamburg youths who had met in an ice-skating rink formed ‘Loafer Clubs’ and ‘Gangster Cliques.’ Later the term ‘Swing Youth’ was applied to them because of their fondness for American music and English clothing. Music was one way for the Swing Youth to defy the regime and protest against an unbearably restrictive life under the Hitler Youth. They were almost all from well-to-do families, and their activity consisted of aberrant jam sessions of listening to records and memorizing the famous Jazz musicians. Clothing was another distinguishable element of the Swing Youth. Middle and upper-class Hamburg Swings wore felt or Bowler-hats, trench coats, tailor-made suits, long jackets and wide trousers. Their shoes had crêpe soles, and around their necks they bound colored ties with a very small button. They also had white silk scarves and on the lapel often pins were stuck on, showing the Union Jack or the US-flag. This unique style of clothing had to be shown off in public, and so the Swing Youth developed the habit of leisurely sauntering up and down Hamburg and Berlin’s most fashionable streets in late afternoon during rush hour. To demonstrate solidarity among themselves, they whistled Swing refrains as greetings and spoke to each other in what English they
knew. ‘Hallo, Old Swing Boy!’ or ‘Heil Swing’ were favorite salutations. For the evening, assorted groups would flock to one of the chosen hangouts, to enjoy the pleasure of the Swing dance and to commune with other Swings. The Swingers also socialized at ice cream parlors and public baths, or they congregated in air raid shelters and at city bars and cafes where swing bands were tolerated. The culture that the Swing Youth upheld might have been subversive in comparison to the predominance of Nazism, but they were not hidden within society.

a) A Swing Youth dance – a report from a member of the Hitler Youth, Hamburg, 1940

The dance music was all English and American. Only swing dancing and jitterbugging took place. At the entrance to the hall stood a notice on which the words “Swing prohibited” had been altered to “Swing requested”. Without exception the participants accompanied the dances and songs by singing English lyrics . . . The dancers made an appalling sight. None of the couples danced normally; there was only swing of the worst sort. Sometimes two boys danced with one girl; sometimes several couples formed a circle, linking arms and jumping, slapping hands, even rubbing the backs of their heads together; and then, bent double, with the top half of the body hanging loosely down, long hair flapping into the face, they dragged themselves around practically on their knees. When the band played a rumba, the dancers went into wild ecstasy, like hysterical negroes during war dances. You could seriously question their sanity. [...] The band played wilder and wilder numbers; none of the players were sitting any longer, they all ‘jitterbugged’ on the stage like wild animals. The situation is comparable to hysterical negroes in war dances"
"They originated in north Germany, namely in Hamburg. The most striking example among these groups is the so-called Swing Youth, on whom there have been reports from various parts of the Reich. These groups are motivated by the desire to have a good time and have increasingly assumed a character bordering on the criminal-antisocial. Even before the war boys and girls in Hamburg from the socially privileged classes joined groups wearing strikingly casual clothing and became fans of English [American] music and dance. At the turn of the year 1939/40, the Flottbeck group organized dances which were attended by 500-600 young people and which were marked by an uninhibited indulgence in swing. After the ban on public dances they organized dances at home, which were marked above all by sexual promiscuity. The whole lifestyle of these members cost a considerable amount of money which they endeavored to procure through criminal acts and, in particular, through theft. The hunger for English dance music and for their own dance bands led to break-ins in shops selling musical instruments. The greed to participate in what appeared to them to be a stylish life in clubs, bars, cafés and house balls suppressed any positive attitude towards responding to the needs of the time. They were unimpressed by the performance of our Wehrmacht [the German army]; those killed in action were sometimes held up to ridicule. An attitude of hostility to the war is clearly apparent. They regard Englishmen as the highest form of human development. A false conception of freedom leads them into opposition to the HJ."
The Edelweiß Pirates

Hitler’s power may lay us low,  
And keep us locked in chains,  
But we will smash the chains one day,  
We’ll be free again.  
We’ve got the fists and we can fight,  
We’ve got the knives and we’ll get them out.  
We want freedom, don’t we boys?  
-Song of the Edelweiß Pirates-

The Edelweiss Pirates were groups of youths who opposed Nazi rule. The Edelweiss Pirates were primarily opposed to the way the Hitler Youth movement had taken over the lives of youths in Hitler’s Germany. The movement started in the Rhineland and then spread out. Members were mainly working class male youths. They would gather together and act in a manner that they would know would anger the local Nazi leaders. Whereas the Nazi Party required Hitler Youth members to wear a uniform that was semi-military, Edelweiss members wore more bohemian clothing, knowing that it would anger the authorities. They also sang songs that the Nazis had banned and played music that was also banned, such as jazz and blues tunes. The Edelweiss Pirates were diametrically the opposite of the Hitler Youth movement, which was run on quasi-military lines. They were free to express what they thought. While boys and girls were strictly segregated in the Hitler Youth movement, the Edelweiss Pirates encouraged the opposite. They created areas within a town or city where members of the Hitler Youth were not tolerated. At no stage were they ever a danger to the Nazi regime and for years they were seen as nothing more than a youthful irritant – youths going through that phase in their lives where rebellion (as they perceived it) was the order of the day.

There was a general objection to the way the Nazis wished to control the lives of the youths in Germany. Members of the Edelweiss Pirates would have had an education controlled by the Nazis while they were at school (compulsory education ended at the age of 14). Under 14’s also had their evening time effectively controlled as well. If someone had been 13 at the time Hitler
became Chancellor in January 1933, they would have experienced a year of a Nazi education syllabus with all that was associated with it before they could have left school. By 1937, he/she would have been 17 – the age of compulsory military service. From the time that person had left school to the time a male youth would have received their call-up papers, there would have been an all-out attempt by the Nazis to control the life of that person. While it is a common perception that everyone was under the control of the Nazis and that the secret police had informants everywhere. It was these young people who formed Edelweiss Pirate groups. Basically, they were anti-authority and non-conformist.

_Nazi Party Report, Dusseldorf, Germany, July 1943_

_a) These adolescents, aged between 12 and 17, hang around late in the evening with musical instruments and young females. Since this riff raff is in large part outside the Hitler Youth and adopts a hostile attitude towards the organization, they represent a danger to other young people. There is a suspicion that it is these youths who have been inscribing the walls of the pedestrian underground with the slogans "Down with Hitler", "Medals for Murder", "Down with Nazi Brutality" etc. However often these inscriptions are removed, within a few days new ones appear on the walls."

_b) The best-known politically hostile group is the Edelweiss Pirates. They organized in the West, namely in Cologne and Dusseldorf, but have subsequently spread over wide areas of the Reich. The Cologne juvenile court judge has recently described their external characteristics in a report. They wear the Edelweiss badge on or under the left lapel [...]. In so far as they belong to the HJ these badges are worn either openly or secretly on the uniform. One often sees the skull badge. The regulation uniform of the Edelweiss Pirates
is short trousers, white socks, a check shirt, a white pullover and scarf and a windcheater. In addition, they have very long hair. A comb is worn in the left sock and a knife in the right one. In so far as girls belong to the gangs they wear white socks, a white pullover or waistcoat. In the warmer months they leave town in their hundreds on foot, by bicycle or train. They distinguish between gatherings and trips. Normally, they meet at night on street corners, in doorways or in parks. They sing their own songs which mostly reflect Russian culture; they exchange experiences from their trips and report on criminal acts they have committed. [...] The boys belong mostly to the 14–18-year-old age group. The leaders, in particular, who are mostly tough and intelligent, come from previous leagues or from political parties. [...] The organization is divided into groups which are named after streets, squares, parks or bunkers. It is astonishing that groups are marked by common external characteristics. This suggests that an umbrella organization or at least a uniform leadership exists which issues directives. However, this is not certain.

Most have an anti-HJ attitude, hate all discipline and thereby place themselves in opposition to the community. However, they are not only politically hostile (recently their attitude has reached the point of being hostile to the state), but, as a result of their composition, they are also criminal and antisocial, so that one often cannot make a distinction between the two types of group.”

1. Explain to what extent the Edelweiß-Pirates can be defined as a resistance group.
2. Compare the perspective of the Edelweiß-Pirates with the perspective of the Nazi regime.
In the early summer of 1942, a group of Munich University students formed around Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell. They sought to evade co-optation by National Socialism and to preserve their intellectual independence. Their numbers included Sophie Scholl, Christoph Probst, and Willi Graf. They were influenced by their professor, Kurt Huber, with whom they discussed fundamental issues of the new political order. In the summer of 1942, the first Weiße Rose leaflets called for resistance against the criminal dictatorship. Two further leaflets followed in the winter of 1942/43. Their resistance was absolutely politically motivated. In their opinion, everyone who did not protest against the injustice was automatically guilty. Their act of resistance was an obligation and duty to them, even though they put themselves in great danger. The members of the Weiße Rose are still remembered today for their moral courage.

The students also tried to forge contacts with other cities. A group of pupils in Ulm formed around Hans Hirzel, who had connections to Hans and Sophie Scholl. On February 18, 1943, Hans and Sophie Scholl were arrested while leaving copies of the sixth leaflet around Munich University.

Hans Scholl, his sister Sophie, and Christoph Probst were sentenced to death on February 22, 1943, and murdered that same day. In April 1943, the “People’s Court” sentenced Alexander Schmorell, Willi Graf, and Kurt Huber to death; other helpers and confidants, including members of the Ulm group, received long prison and penal sentences.
One of the leaflets entitled “Passive Resistance to National Socialism” stated:

“Many, perhaps most, of the readers of these leaflets do not see clearly how they can practice an effective opposition. They do not see any avenues open to them. We want to try to show them that everyone is in a position to contribute to the overthrow of the system. It can be done only by the cooperation of many convinced, energetic people — people who are agreed as to the means they must use. We have no great number of choices as to the means. The only one available is passive resistance. The meaning and goal of passive resistance is to topple National Socialism, and in this struggle we must not recoil from any course, any action, whatever its nature. A victory of fascist Germany in this war would have immeasurable frightful consequences. We cannot provide each man with the blueprint for his acts. We can only suggest them in general terms. Sabotage in armaments plants and war industries, at all gatherings, rallies and organizations of the National Socialist Party ……..convince all your acquaintances of the hopelessness of this war…………….and urge them to passive resistance.”

Another leaflet was called “To the fellow fighters in the resistance”, which was written in February 1943, after the German defeat at Stalingrad.

“The day of reckoning has come — the reckoning of German youth with the most abominable tyrant our people have ever been forced to endure. We grew up in a state in which all free expression of opinion is ruthlessly suppressed. The Hitler Youth, the SA, the SS have all tried to drug us, to regiment us in the most promising years of our lives. For us there is but one slogan: fight against the party. The name of Germany is dishonored for all time if German youth does not finally rise, take revenge, smash its tormentors. Students! The German people look to us.”